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A NOOK IN THE APENNINES

OR,

A SUMMER BENEATH THE CHESTNUTS.

BY

LEADER SCOTT.

AUTHOR OF "THE PAINTER'S ORDEAL," ETC., ETC.

With Twenty-seven Illustrations, chiefly from Original Sketches.

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VILLAGE OF LUCCHIO.

TO

"AUNT LOUISA,"

IN

REMEMBRANCE OF

HAPPY SUMMER DAYS.

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A NOOK IN THE APENNINES.

CHAPTER I.

A CONTRAST.

June 11.—FLORENCE. Thermometer 96° in the shade. Semi-darkness and stifling heat in the closed houses. Blinding glare and fierce burning sun in the streets. We can stand it no longer, and forthwith prepare to fly to the mountains, where an old villa is ready for us. Even the exertion of packing can only be borne by the stimulating hopes of coolness on the morrow.

June 13.—THE MOUNTAIN VILLA. Thermometer 70° in the open air, 50° in the rippling water of the fountain. Coolness! freshness! shade!—all the delights of an English climate without any of its drawbacks. We are 2,220 feet nearer the

clouds, or rather above the level of the sea, which is not quite the same thing. It is a new sensation to wake and see this quaint old house flooded with sunshine, and yet not feel obliged to shut it out as if it were an enemy.

CHAPTER II.

HOW WE JOURNEY TO THE NOOK.

June 12.—*En voyage.* A family Hegira! The Antiquary in the character of a patriarch. We create quite a sensation at Pistoja, as we start from the inn after our railway journey. Two huge lumbering carriages are piled up before and behind with luggage, baths, etc., and filled with children, nurses, dolls, and pets,—in fact the complete paraphernalia of a moving household. Great content reigns in the nursery carriage as we drive along the fertile plain, counting the numerous fountains and water-falls by the roadside. At the foot of the long ascent we draw up before a primitive inn, and the *trapeli* are attached. A *trapelo* is an extra mule or horse fastened in front of the carriage horses by loose ropes. As a man always walks by the side of a *trapelo* the ascent is necessarily slow. We toil on for three long hours, the men sauntering, the mules labouring, the horses dawdling, as if they know perfectly that the *trapeli* are hired to do their work for them. The scenery

grows more exquisite, and the children become more restless and weary at every turn. Round and round the points of precipitous mountains, now with the sun scorching us, then with a cold blast in our faces. Up, up, up—the thermometer which hangs in the carriage falling as we ascend, till it has marked 20°. At length we reach the summit of the pass, the *trapeli* are detached from us and take their easy road, descending by the way we have come; our drivers mount, brace up their steeds to action, screw the drags to full pressure, and we bowl merrily down into a new series of hills and valleys.

Then we begin to look out for a white house, such as the Nook has been described to us; but it never seems to come in sight, and we stop at length apparently in the high road.

Yes! there, high up above us on a rough lawn, is a large white house with rounded windows and arched green doors, and a cluster of cottages around it. A tribe of *contadini* (peasants) descends to meet us, mingling their welcome with regret that we have arrived before they expected us, and all is not prepared.

The carriages can approach no nearer, we must alight and climb the rough little stony road to the old three-cornered lawn, which is rendered verdant

by chestnut trees, some gnarled fruit trees, and a rough hedge of roses. The great green door is opened; we enter, curious to see what is to be our abode for three months. The children, always first, rush into the house. "Oh, where are the chairs and tables?" they cry in dismay.

The first room is empty of all except a gaunt,



THE NOOK.

spectral clock, which looks as though it has marked the time for centuries; the second is furnished only with a wheeled chair of antique construction, of which the children make a prize directly. We had understood that there were no luxuries, but had not come prepared for absolute

destitution of civilized commodities. We look each other in the face, and pass on silently.

Domestic civilization begins on the first floor, but it is a civilization of the past. A vaulted flight of stone steps leads into a great dining-room, with a stone chimney corner of mediæval dimensions, heavy beams across the ceiling, and old corniced wooden cupboards in the depth of the thick walls. A wondrous round oak table on a circle of carved pillars stands in the centre, several high-backed black oak chairs are ranged around, and on the walls a collection of family portraits, in the Kneller style, hang in carved octagon frames. The sun shining through three windows fills this charmingly quaint room, and we fall in love with it on the spot.

Opening from the right is a bedroom with a mysterious old canopied bedstead, hung with yellow drapery and fringes of a manufactory unknown to our modern minds. More old paintings, and a chest of drawers of such solid and great proportions that one would imagine the ancient possessors were of the race of giants. The same antiquity and solidity runs through the house. Another room is furnished with certain carved armchairs, which the united efforts of two persons could scarcely move. They are covered with

ancient Cordova leather, and bear the family arms in a shield on the back. The tables are slabs of oak some inches thick, resting on solid pillars or lyre-shaped tressels. The doors are all of rich dark old oak, and the keys veritable antiquarian treasures of mediæval ornamental ironwork.

Upstairs we find several bedrooms, and another large *salone*, furnished with the Cordova leather chairs and oak tables, on one of which is a draught and backgammon board of primitive construction, the games being marked out with red and white paint. There is also an hour glass which Saturn himself might have used. On the walls are a collection of paintings of a fearful and appalling description. They are certain conglomerations of fruit and flowers arranged so as to represent human figures, and they have a peculiarly awful aspect.

In one room are two old carved oak bedsteads, so very solid as to be immovable. The same room has also two old oak chests, fully ten feet long, and supported on carved lions' claws. They are large and dark and mysterious enough to entomb a dozen Griseldas,—for Boccaccio has shown that the mistletoe bough legend is of Italian origin, a certain Countess Griselda being the real heroine.

These *casse* we suppose to have been the repositories of the ancient possessors' treasures of

homespun and brocades. Every household of mediæval times in Italy possessed such chests, and every bride had one to hold her *corredo*, or outfit of house and personal linen.

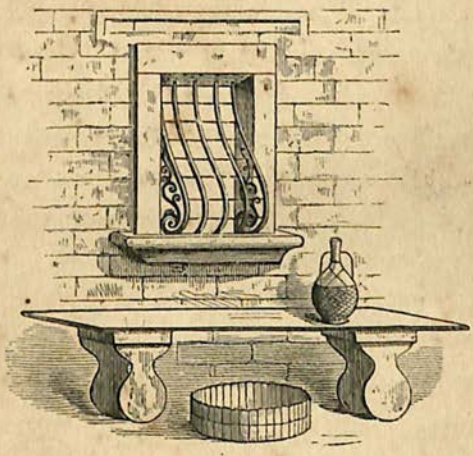
"What a delightful old house!" exclaims Aunt Louisa. "It ought to be full of legends; I must find them all out while we are here."

But what is this door we have not opened! We peep and are half frightened. It is a kind of lumber closet leading up some ruined or unfinished stairs. Black walls, black logs and sticks and shapeless lumber, all dim, dark, and mysterious, with here and there a face looming out of an old canvas like a ghost. We shut it up again, and go down to an impromptu meal, for which the hungry children are craving.

Of course the cook is in despair. She declares the kitchen is destitute of everything needful, and what there is is rusty with age. But cooks are always hard to please out of their own kitchen—and very often in it. She only smiles grimly when the housewife says, "We have not come here for luxuries, but for health and coolness, and are only too willing to give up conventionality for this lovely scenery."

After dinner we have leisure to make further explorations, and discover a most delightful ter-

race or *loggia*, with a roof of oaken beams supported by pillars. Here we shall be able to sit and enjoy the cool air, the wide view of the distant mountains, and the musical rippling of a tiny waterfall tumbling down its rocky course through the lawn just below us. On the other side of the house is a quaint, grassy courtyard, with



FERRATURA OF COURTYARD WINDOW.

a fountain of cool water, stone tables and seats. Above the fountain a low wall is covered with luxuriant Virginia creeper, behind which the chestnut woods rise up green and rich, clothing the steep side of a mountain.

Over the door of the house are the family

arms, two ears of "*miglio*," or "millet," and the date 1637. This rather disappoints us, for we had supposed the house to be much older. The date may possibly be that of its restoration. The windows that command the cortile are protected by curved iron gratings of very fine style.

Issuing from the covered gate which forms the egress of the yard, we find ourselves on the village *piazzetta*, a chapel stands opposite, and the houses of the peasants irregularly placed lower down, the old mule-pack road winding its stony way amongst them. This rough path, which is paved in the true Etruscan and Roman style, was once the only high road to Modena; but in those days travelling carriages were not in use.

Following the mule road,—in which the paving stones seem revenging themselves for the centuries of trampling under foot which they have endured, by standing independently on end, in all positions, to the great peril of unwary passers-by,—we reach the waterfall; cross above it on some large stepping-stones, and arrive at a charming shady nook on the side of the woody hill.

Here is another *al fresco* settlement, furnished with stone seats and table; also a second fountain pouring its endless tranquil stream from a niche in the rock. Some native artist has adorned

this niche with a round rosy face of incredible flatness, and two uplifted hands coming from "nowhere in particular." Aunt Louisa opines "that the artist meant to *embody* his *idea* of Narcissus astonished at his own reflection. But his *idea* has turned out *bodyless;* and if Narcissus reflects at all, he has every reason to be astonished at his own ugliness.

On the terrace above the fountain is a flowery garden, where a pillar is conspicuous surmounted by a head carved in stone. This, also, is native talent, and might almost be taken as proof of the Etruscan art which flourished on this soil being indigenous, and not imported; for the head is of exactly the archaic style of the cover of an Etruscan "*canopus*," *i.e.*, cinerary vase, in a human form.

A new house built by the *contadini* themselves stands close by the garden.



KEY OF CUPBOARD IN SALONE OF THE VILLA.

CHAPTER III.

THE MOUNTAINS WHICH SURROUND THE NOOK.

June 13.—We have begun to realize that we are indeed living in the mountains, and the spirit of the Apennines enters into our hearts day by day. There is a peculiar joyousness in the light pure air that raises our spirits to a perfect exhilaration; we feel inclined to go into raptures over everything, and take all the human creatures around us into our overflowing affections. The Villa commands a tableland on the side of a chestnut-wooded mountain. All behind the house is woodland, but in front of it the hills divide, opening out into two valleys,—the valley of the Lima, and that of the Libro Aperto.

In the first, the chestnut forests stretch luxuriantly down the slopes from the Nook, till they merge into green pasture lands on the banks of the river Lima, whose wide bed of white rocks, spanned here and there by ancient bridges,

winds serpent-like between the feet of the many mountains, which meet and dovetail into one another, range behind range, till the Pania in the distance seems like a dome of rose-coloured cloud. And every range and every hill has a different character. The Poggio Bombolante stands up grand and rugged in front of us, dividing the one vale from the other. It has two great peaks that shoot up into the sky, forming a harmonious background to a pair of ruined towers, which stand half-way up its side. These are the remains of the mediæval castle of Popiglio,—the more modern village of the same name straggles along, an irregular row of white and black houses, far below it, yet still above the river. Behind the Bombolante hill a range of rocky precipices, of various warm colours, called the Alpi di Vico arise, and at their feet the little towers and dwellings of Vico Pancelorum. Farther back a wide cone sends its purple point up against the yellow sky, and its ruddy precipices reach down to the Lima. This is Monte Pellegrino, once the abode of holy hermits, who lived almost entirely on the silvery-flowered thistles which abound there. Some peasants still eat these plants, which are something like artichokes when boiled.

The next dome-shaped mountain has smooth velvet sward clothing its sides. In the morning it is green like moss; at midday it takes deep blue shadows into its verdant folds; and at evening its colours—chameleon-like—change from purple to rose, and then to gold, in a way wondrous to behold. This is the Prato Fiorito, or "Field of Flowers," where the herbage is a perfect carpet of floral treasures. Legend says that Æsculapius had his mysterious garden of herbs on the summit of this mountain,—a garden no mortal was permitted to see; but that the winds, or more classically Zephyr, stole the winged seeds and dispersed them on the hill sides, where they are to this day.

Like a shadow of the Prato Fiorito, the dome of the Pania rises larger but more cloudlike in the far-off distance; and behind the Vico Alps clusters of white spires shoot up, like silver sculptures,—the peaks of the distant Carrara range.

All these form the landscape on the right of the winding Lima. Its left bank is bounded by crags and precipices rising gloomy and rugged in the shadow. On one of these, a great towering reddish cliff, is a village, with the traditional ruined castle above it. This is Lucchio, which literally—

"Like an eagle's nest, hangs on the crest
Of purple Apennine."

The houses, as we see them from here, look as though carved or painted on the very face of the cliff; they seem to hang in air, so high and so perilous is their position.

The valley on the right of our panorama is not so complicated to our view. The mountain called the Libro Aperto, or "open book," runs along forming an undulating sky line on the north, with a rocky cleft at the end like the leaves of an open book. Before this a panorama of rounded hills, folding into one another, in soft clefts and undulations, sinks by degrees into the level of chestnut woods and terraced corn lands, alternating with the clusters of houses and towers which tell of mountain towns.

Turning eastward from the Villa, the view is entirely changed. There is the long, narrow valley of the Limano at our feet, between two chestnut forests which climb the sides of our hill and the one opposite. In the midst rises a green foliaged knoll, on whose point is a picturesque little brown village, called Piteglio, which lies only a short mile from the Nook, and contains the parish church of our peasants. But though one might know quite well the form of every hill in

this vast panorama, it would be impossible ever to tire of it, for the effects and colouring are always new and ever changing. Every sunset gives new glories, every cloud fresh and beautiful shadows. Even when there is no sunshine to give it life, the very clouds seem alive themselves. They come rolling in masses over the points as if a giant hand were pushing them from behind; they make one think of Sisyphus rolling his stones up the hill in Hades, with such force do they seem propelled over the summit. Then the great white masses slide downwards, till the mountain tops rise as if in mid air above them. The winds come and tear the masses into shreds which float off like spirit vapours into the valley.

Seeing these in the dusk it is very easy to imagine how the many superstitions of shapeless gliding spirits have arisen in hilly regions.

Sometimes the clouds take hands and close us in till we cannot see the face of our familiar landmark Piteglio, or they approach and settle on the very lawn, dissolving in floods before our eyes.

Truly it is a wondrous life in the mountains.

CHAPTER IV.

LEGENDS OF THE NOOK.

June 14.—We are becoming acquainted with the inhabitants of the hamlet, for distance having removed us far from society, we find great amusement in studying our only neighbours, the mountaineers. Their houses cluster close around the Villa; they share the lawn (if such the field in front can be called); when we go out every face we meet gives pleasant greeting; and kind voices "hope we like the place and the air," just as though they were courteous hosts doing the honours to stranger guests.

The innate politeness, one may almost say "breeding," of these chestnut eaters, would be astonishing were it not already a well-known theme of greater writers before our time. Dante, Alfieri, and Massimo d'Azeglio, all write of the *cortesia* of the Pistojese mountaineers. They speak a charming, soft Italian, very pleasant

after the aspirating dialect of the rapid native Florentines.

Comparing these peasants with the same class in England, one is amazed at this refinement of manner, and can only attribute it to their older civilization. The polish of the Etruscan lucumo and the Roman patrician, even in the fall of the great civilizations, has penetrated every stratum of society, and is perhaps left the longest in the lower ones.

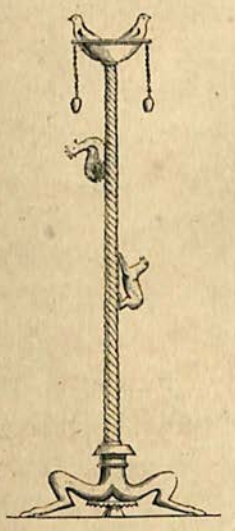
The Italian peasant is never a silent boor in the presence of his masters, he always has a self-possessed courtesy and pleasant smile, and talks as man to man with his superiors. He is the natural descendant of the polished Etrurian, as the fiercer southern Italian is of the warlike Samnite or savage Oscan.

The hamlet consists of eight families, all more or less connected by relationship and intermarriage.

There are three brothers of one family all married; another family consists of three bachelors; whilst of a third triad, two are married and one single.

Amongst the children, who all look like brothers and sisters, is a curious ramification of cousinhood very puzzling to the uninitiated.

The peasants are all sons of the soil, each tilling his own bit of land, as his father and grandfather did before him, rarely changing habitations, which are often hereditary for many generations.



ETRUSCAN CANDELABRA.
(*From a tomb.*)



TUSCAN LUCERNA, 1878.

We have found proof of this in the Villa, where are some old papers and ledgers containing accounts between some ancient proprietor and his men, the names of the labourers whom he paid

one hundred and fifty years ago are the same as those of the present peasants, and we may conclude they were not new comers at that time. Besides cultivating their own beans and potatoes, the peasants have also charge of the chestnut woods belonging to the proprietor, taking as payment the half produce of the chestnut harvest, which supplies them with food for the whole year.

They live almost entirely on *necci*, or chestnut cake, varied with other vegetable food, rarely or never tasting meat.

To-day being a *festa*, the population of the village is assembled, according to time-honoured custom, on the little piazza at our gate. Stone ledges run along the wall of the Villa, and of the opposite chapel where the defunct lords of the soil are interred. Here the people sit *al fresco*, just as the Florentines sat round their Duomo in the days of Dante, telling their legends and stories. In the same style the poor man sat at the rich man's gate in the time of Christ, and as in farther back Roman days the clients clustered round the palace courtyard of their patron.

Here we join the characteristic group, and here are our children, who have already made full acquaintance with them all by name.

Five-year-old Harry introduces the house-

mother to a brigandish-looking man with a slouch hat and short pipe with, "See, mamma, this is Pietro, my great friend; he is more than that, I will call him my brother. And that is Narciso, he is another brother."

Master Harry has reason for his friendship, for the men, who are very ingenious, are all indefatigable in manufacturing toys for the children, whips, carts, whistles, bows and arrows, water-wheels,—anything which can be made out of wood or bark. There are all the youths, gentle Giorgio, dandy Giulio, and handsome Domenico, in their best suits. Their chief peculiarity appears to consist in having a coat and not wearing it, for they all carry their outer garments slung loosely over one shoulder; and there are the pretty girls, with bright handkerchiefs over their glossy locks, and rosy faces full of smiles. Conspicuous among them is the chief *contadino*, who sits on the low wall with his legs encased in a pair of yellowish garments of preternatural thickness and stiffness; they look as if they support him instead of his wearing them, so creaselessly do they envelope his limbs. His coat is also of a yellowish hue, and his necktie of a brilliant blue. He has a wooden look altogether, as if carved in yellow boxwood. His eyes are prominently glassy, his mouth straight and

square, like the hole of a letter-box; when he laughs it elongates towards his ears, leaving the eyes as stolid as ever. He looks as if he could shut up a secret tight, but nevertheless, when once wound up to the starting-point, he turns out a famous talking machine, and will tell all the legends of the house like a book. The Antiquary glances at the chapel opposite, and wonders when it was built, and if it is as old as the Villa.

The machine is immediately set in motion.

"If you look on the last wooden beam end you will see the date, and on the stone carving of the arms is written P. D. M. F., which means, '*Prete Domenico mi fece.* Priest Domenico made me.'"

"Who was Priest Domenico?" asks the Antiquary.

"He was one of the ancient padroni, and very fond of stone-cutting; he did all the stonework of that chapel with his own hands. There is a funny story about him;" and the wooden mouth elongates.

"Tell us!" we exclaim.

"Well; some of the priest's enemies went and told his bishop that Padre Domenico neglected his masses, and even put off his robes, and was no better than a stonemason. The Bishop of Pistoja sent two priests to see if it was true before

excommunicating him. Up came the two priests on their mules,—for this was the only road in those days, and they did not use wheeled conveyances,—up rode the ecclesiastics, and a little way off, at the stone quarries, there was a mason in his dusty working dress. He was the padre himself, you know," half whispers the narrator with a peculiar wink of his glassy eye. "So they stopped and said, 'My good man, do you know of a Priest Domenico in these parts?' 'Oh yes, your reverences,' replies he, 'that is his house; if you take this road it will lead you to it,' and he showed them the longest way round. As soon as their backs were turned he scampered home a short way across the woods, called his servant, and got into bed as quickly as possible. When the two priests knocked at the door, the servant was there all ready. He asked them to walk in and rest a little,—was 'sorry his master was not well, he was reposing on his bed; but if their reverences would have *pazienza*, he would go instantly and call him.' A few minutes later in walks Padre Domenico in full canonicals, every inch a priest, and neither of them recognised him a bit," adds Luigi with a delighted chuckle. "Well! he talked divinity, and gave them good refreshments, and the two returned to their bishop

to say that all the stories were slanders, and Padre Domenico was a godly and an excellent priest. Ah! our padroni had their wits about them, *they* had!"

"Some of them were very fierce, though," said Giorgio, the brother of Luigi. "There was once a Sigr. Francesco, who had a little girl. She came to her father one day and said, 'Father, Pietrino has struck me.' The father went and found the little boy she mentioned, and said, 'With which hand did you strike my child?' 'With this one,' said the little fellow, holding it up. 'Then you will never strike with that hand again,' answered the father. And he didn't, for the man cut it right off there and then."

A shudder runs through the assembly, and a mother pulling her little boy into her arms, sighs, "Ah! they were terrible times to live in, when men were so fierce."

Here Luigi takes up the tale. "My grandfather," says he, "was servant to the last of the family. Ah! he was another wild one, he was. He had to fly for his life once, for something he had done; but instead of running away, he just shut himself up in this villa, mounted his guns, and resisted all the forces that were sent against him."

"That accounts for the port-holes on the *loggia* and in the courtyard," we say.

"Exactly so," replies Luigi. "He had port-holes on every side; and he and his men kept watch, so that as soon as any one approached they were shot down, without even seeing an enemy."

"Was he married?" asks Aunt Louisa.

"Ay, that he was, the worse for his wife. He was so jealous of her, he would not let another man look at her; and my grandfather always had to warm himself with his back to the fire, which was in the middle of the room, and eat his meals with his back to the table, so as not to look at his mistress. In those days the servants ate at the same table as the masters, you know. And yet he wasn't so kind to her himself, after all; for he used to beat her, and ill-use her so that she could bear it no longer, and appealed to her friends. Poor soul! many is the time my grandfather has known her hide in those dark attics to get out of his way."

"Ah! so that is the secret of the skeleton closet!" and I recall my feelings on looking into it on the day of our arrival, and our presentiments that it had a story.

"And her friends, what did they do for her?" asks an interested listener.

"They took her away and put her into a convent for safety, and sent him to the galleys, where his hands were blistered with hard work. When he came out he turned religious, and went for a long pilgrimage to Loreto, to Rome, and other places, and then his wife came back to him again, and they lived together till she died."

"He used to do queer things, though. Tell about the horse, Luigi," says Giorgio.

"Yes," laughs Luigi; "he had a horse which he loved as well as his wife, perhaps more so, for he didn't beat him as he did her. "Well! he must needs have his horse upstairs to dinner every day: it came lumbering up the old stairs—they were of wood in those days, you know—and his poor wife, who was mortally afraid of the creature, especially in a room, had to sit next it at table. She begged and prayed, but he gave no heed, till one day it began to kick on the stairs, and kicked down all the old rotten boards, so he could not bring it up any more; and the wooden staircase was in time replaced by the present stone one.

"The way he married his daughter was very queer too." (Luigi being well wound up now, we were in for plenty of legends.) "He had two daughters, and he had also a friend who lived at Pistoja, with whom he was very fond of playing

backgammon on market days. One day they quarrelled over the game, Ser Francesco said very insulting things to the other, and they parted threatening all sorts of dreadful revenges.

"In fact the friend felt himself so much insulted that, declaring he would have Ser Francesco's life, he came next day with a gun in his hand prowling about the Villa. My grandfather saw him, and told his master to keep in hiding, which he did till his enemy, tired of waiting, went away. This happened a good many times, till at last they both cooled, and the friend sent a message to ask him to talk over matters quietly, as he had a proposal to make to him.

"So they met at the *caffe* in Pistoja, and over a glass of *poncè*, the friend said that if Ser Francesco would give him his daughter in marriage, they would make up the quarrel, and the insults should be forgotten. This was agreed to, and the marriage took place; but the *sposo* was over sixty, and the poor little *sposa* in her teens. And that was how the Villa passed out of the family; for he, having no sons, the daughters inherited," concluded Luigi.

We cannot, of course, vouch for the truth of all these legends; but they were very amusing to hear as they were told by the solemn narrator to his audience.

We began to realise how the tales of the heroes arose: the descendants of the pioneer who led forth a new colony in primitive days, probably told the stories of the grandfather's adventures and prowess. Being oft told they grew, till the ancestor was looked on as divine and miraculous. The hero of the legend, being said to be as strong as Hercules, or as wise as Ulysses, or brave as Eneas, in one or two generations, legend, omitting the adverbs, called him Hercules, or Ulysses, or Eneas; and so might have arisen the fables of the origin of the early Italian peoples.

CHAPTER V.

THE GRANDMOTHERS.

June 15.—Three is the magic number which influences the Nook. Three families of three sons in each form the heads of the nine households. Pietro has three pretty daughters, and Maso has three tiny boys; and presiding over the whole community, as the Fates preside over mortals, are three grandmothers. When they meet together and sit at our gate, with their fresh old faces and elf locks of curly white hair, I can think of nothing but the Fates. There is Clotho, the guardian of life, a bright, rosy-faced, active old dame of eighty-five years of age, who seems likely to live as long again. She, like her mythological prototype, passes her days in spinning; never have I seen her without her distaff, and her spindle is always whirling, whirling, as if the undying life were in it. She delights in the whitest wool too, like the fate of happiness.

Then there is Lachesis, a sturdy, stern old

woman, who rules and orders all her grown-up sons as if they were blind mortals following her relentless decrees. Her dread office is marked sometimes by a distaff, but more often by the "sickle," that gleams always polished about her. Now it is stuck into her apron string, anon she flings it over her shoulder or brandishes it in her hand.



THE THREE GRANDMOTHERS.

Thirdly comes old Atropos, most melancholy and most weird of all the three, the spinner of ominous black wool. Atropos is a poor, withered, bent creature, whose seventy years weigh more heavily on her than Clotho's eighty-five. She has looked so long on death through the veil of her sufferings that she can no longer smile on

life. If she sees young people laughing around her, she shakes her melancholy old head as if to say, "Ah! when you are like me you will laugh no more."

And when she has this look, mothers draw away their children and sign them with a cross, for they say the poor old deformed creature has the evil eye, a superstition which still lingers in remote parts of the country. But unfortunately for herself, our Atropos, so far from being the mistress of other people's destiny, is herself the abject slave of a tyrant,—the fat, despotic, toddling boy, her grandson. Where Pippino chooses to go, there his grandmother, doubled with her infirmities, drags herself after, holding on to the skirts of his clothing. Does she sit down to rest and recover her gasping breath? Pippo sees a certain stone or flower at a distance, and off he toddles again, his infantine strength overmastering poor *nonna's* weakness.

"Why does not his mother take care of him?" we ask.

"Oh," replies Atropos, "she says he worries her, because he is always crying 'Mamma,' when she is near. He is a dreadfully tiresome child; but there, we must do what we can, and as I can't work, why I must mind the child,"—and away go

the two, for Pippo has espied his favourite hen and wants to catch hold of her tail.

"He will be the death of me, some day," sighs poor Atropos after a vain effort to rest herself again.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INTELLECTUAL PEASANTS.

June 29.—This morning I have had a talk with Luigi, who was smoking the pipe of peace at our gate after a morning's work. And what do you suppose our wooden-featured friend talked of? Not the crops and the weather,—no! his mind soars beyond that. He asked me if I had read Tasso! and did I like the Gerusalemmè Liberata? Then he went on to Ariosto and Dante, and quoted whole verses of his favourite poets. Next he put this astounding question: "Is it true, signora, that there are three lost things now? That a star is gone from the sky, and a fish from the sea, and a bird from the air?"

"Many species of animals once known are now extinct," I reply vaguely, not quite understanding his drift.

"Yes; but these were so much written about by the poets, and now they tell me there are no

such things. The bird was called the 'Phœnix,' and the fish the 'Siren.'"

I breathed freely again. Luigi's knowledge was not scientific, but only poetic. Then he went on to explain how the phœnix made her nest, then offered herself up a burning sacrifice, and as she died her offspring arose from the heat of her ashes, and for authority quoted a beautiful verse from one of the ancient poets.

"I think the poet only meant to show how life springs from decay and seeming death, as the fruit grows only when the flower is dead, and as the soul rises to fresh life from the dying body," I ventured to remark.

But Luigi's faith in poesy would accept no myths.

"At least you must own that the Siren was real," he says. "Why, were not many mariners lost who listened to her? and was not Ulysses only saved by refusing to hearken? They say that even now sailors won't go near those rocks; they are down on the south coast, near Sicily somewhere."

From sirens we got to the terrestrial masculine of those charmers, and the wonderful things "il Diavolo" delighted to do.

"Have you seen that bridge at the baths of Lucca which they say he built in a single night?"

I had not beheld this miracle of architecture, so Luigi, stooping to pick up a bit of limestone, drew a sketch of it on the pavement.

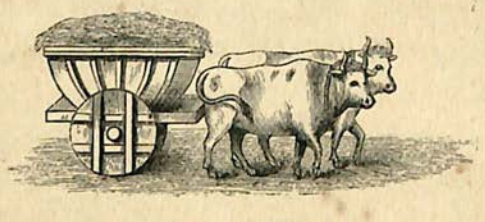
"Of course it must be the devil's work, for no man in his senses would build a bridge with three little arches on one side and one on the other, with a monstrous big one in the middle, and a point so sharp that when a cart or carriage has to cross, it takes five men to push it behind, and bars of wood under the wheels at every step; and when you are at the top, it's lucky if you get down safe without breaking the horse's legs on the other side."

The legend says that the devil built it because the architect was in despair how to fling an arch across the torrent; but he made him promise to give him the first live thing that went over it, knowing that the architect's pretty daughter came very often to see her father there. In fact she came that very evening, but some inspiration made her send her little dog over before her. The devil was so angry that he took up the dog and dashed him against the parapet so hard that it made a hole in the masonry and fell through to the torrent beneath. "It is quite true," adds Luigi; "for the hole is there now, and no mason can stop it up; any work put there always falls out again."

At this juncture his younger brother, Giulio, the Adonis of the village, made his appearance with an illustrated paper.

"Perhaps the signora can help me to find out this rebus," he says, showing me a page of riddles at the end. "I have guessed these three, but number four puzzles me."

My amazement will out, "Where in the world



ROMAN PLAUSTRUM.

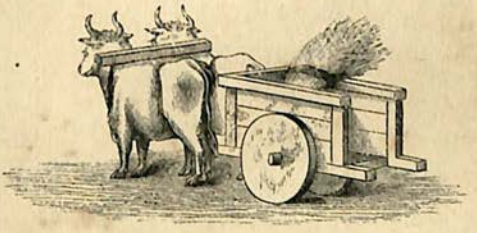
do these peasants, far from schools and their fellow-men, pick up such education?" I venture to put my curiosity into words. "When do you find time for so much reading?"

They laugh simultaneously. "If the signora were only here in the winter, she would have then to ask what we can do with our time, for we have so much more than we need on our hands. There are times when it snows for a

week, and we can't get out to do a stroke of work."

"How do you amuse yourselves, then?" I inquired.

"We generally meet in one house and sit round the fire. One of us reads and the rest listen. The women have their spinning and weaving to do; they don't mind it so much, but 'tis a terribly irksome time for us."



OX CART WITH SOLID WHEELS, 1878.

"Then we sit round and read while we are watching the chestnuts drying in the *seccatoio*," adds Luigi; "for we need something to keep us awake all night. Some of them play cards, but mother does not like us to get into that way."

I need not say that Lachesis is the mother whose word is so potent with this grave man of forty.

With a promise of a parcel of new books

to beguile the long hours of the coming winter we broke up this literary conference, and the two brothers went off to work again, with their picks or *zappe* on their shoulders.

Ploughs, even the primitive Italian ones, are not in use at the Nook, the cornfields are mere strips or terraces earthed up on the sides of the steep hills. From a distance they look like golden ladders. Of course ploughing is impossible; all the land is worked with the *zappa*, a broad-bladed pick, which is flung up high above the head and brought down with great force, so that the earth is deeply dug and turned.

A primitive patriarchal and fraternal system is much practised here. The families keep so closely together in their work, that if you see the first man in a field, you know instinctively who all the others will be.

The Bettoni invariably go to *zappare* in concert. We often look up the mountain and see three figures in a row high above us, with the *zappe* rising and falling like the dampers of a pianoforte, and not without harmony withal.

The Andrucci are generally to be found labouring together with their respective wives, for in that family woman's prerogative as the weaker sex does not seem to be respected. Indeed, the

women in the mountains are indefatigable. The mason brothers, Lenini, go away to their work in distant villages, and to the Maremma in the winter; while their wives and sisters almost entirely cultivate the landed inheritance of the family.

CHAPTER VII.

TUSCAN SHEPHERDESSES.

THE "Bopeep" period seems a stage in the life of most mountain lasses. The first five years of their existence are given to baby play, toddling about barefoot, hand in hand with other toddlers, pulling flowers to pieces, picking up fallen fruits under the trees, dragging each other about in a rough cart on wooden rollers, and diverting themselves on each other's thresholds. The second five years is usually devoted by little girls to carrying the swaddled babies who are not able to walk, and leading about the sturdy little fellows who can use their feet, but not their judgment. These baby-foster-mothers always fill me with pity, they seem to toil so in the service of their unwitting tyrants, and the swathed bundle totters dangerously in the little weak arms which can scarcely clasp it. In the third lustre, a girl gives up the care of the

lambs of the home flock and takes charge of the more numerous sheep further afield.

Rosa's eldest daughter and Pietro's youngest have both reached the shepherdess' age, and might be seen every morning leading away their respective paternal flocks, assisted by a pig, which in mountain regions is frequently the substitute for a sheep dog. It is also less expensive, because it picks up its own food in the woods, and when winter comes can be transformed into food for the family. It is astonishing how clever the pig is in keeping the flock together.

The pretty little maiden, whirling her spindle or knitting her blue stocking, strolls on calmly before, with her red kerchief tied over her chestnut braids, the sheep following closely behind her; there are thin white sheep, and long-legged black ones, nondescript speckled or piebald creatures, very unlike a fleecy English flock. One wonders why the black ones are kept, but yet for the sake of ancient story we take an interest in them. They bring back a memory of Jacob dividing Laban's flocks; and then in the more mythical Etruscan times, black sheep were sacred to Pluto, all the sacrifices to the infernal deities who held such sway over the mystery-loving people of those days being made with black sheep. Thence came the

myth that when Atropos, the weird fate, spun black wool, a mortal was doomed to die.

The young girls lead their flocks up the rugged mountain paths, under the chestnut forests, to the higher glades where fresher grass and more luxuriant ferns grow. Here Bopeep flings herself down on a mossy bed, and knits or spins or muses, sings *stornelli* or talks to others of her class, watching her flock and occasionally calling back a stray member. Thus the long hours pass till the shadows creep eastward, when she calls the sheep and descends again in time to partake of the household supper of steaming yellow *polenta*, or white beans. In families where there are no young girls of the shepherdess age, a damsel is hired from a neighbouring hearth where the feminine element preponderates.

The third and prettiest Bopeep of the village is a hired *garzona*, who leads forth the numerous flocks of Luigi and his mother Lachesis. This large-eyed, rosy-cheeked damsel, poetically called Filomena, is one of a family of seven daughters, whose home is a lonely little farm higher up the mountain. Filomena is bound to stay five years with Lachesis, who clothes and feeds her in return for her services, which is the usual agreement. Sometimes an extra payment is added in

the shape of a sack or two of chestnuts at the gathering. Filomena is not wholly divided from her family by this arrangement, for we notice that she invariably leads her flock up towards the paternal homestead, and once having wandered so far ourselves we found her dancing about on a grassy glade with two or three of her sisters, making the woods ring with their merry voices, while the black and white sheep placidly cropped the herbage around them, under the guardianship of the pig.

Living always amongst the woods, the shepherdesses might be supposed to be a very fearless race, and so they are as far as the natural is concerned, but they have a very wide faith in and exaggerated awe of the supernatural. Poor little Filomena has suffered very material injuries and sprained her foot through her superstitious terrors.

One evening she was leading her charges home in the gloaming, when she saw two indistinct figures gliding towards her, two white spirits as she imagined; on they came silently, and after gazing with dilated eyes for some moments, the frightened girl took to flight; but, alas! the gathering darkness and the blindness of terror combined to lead her feet

astray, and she fell screaming over a precipice from the stony pathway. Imagine the intensity of her shrieks when the wood spirits who had caused her alarm came flying towards her. She tried frantically to get up and run away again, but her ancle was useless, and pain held her prisoner till familiar voices came from the spirits, who inquired, "Che cos 'hai, Filomena?" And she replied trembling, through sobs and tears, "Oh! Maria, is it you? I thought you were a ghost, and I've fallen down and hurt myself! *oi, oi.*" (If ever a Tuscan is in pain, the invariable outlet to his feelings is this expressive interjection, "oi, oi.") The wood spirits were only the light cotton dresses of Maria and our nurse, who had been for a Sunday excursion to a distant village with Luigi. Between them they carried poor Filomena home, and she has for the last week been hobbling with a stick about the village, while a stranger leads the sheep to pasture.

The fourth lustre of a mountain girl's life is spent at home, it is the *Nausicăa* period, when the damsel goes with others of her age to wash the linen in the brook, and spreads out the results of her spinning and weaving in long lines to bleach on the grassy slopes. Pietro's three pretty daughters and Luigi's sister often form a

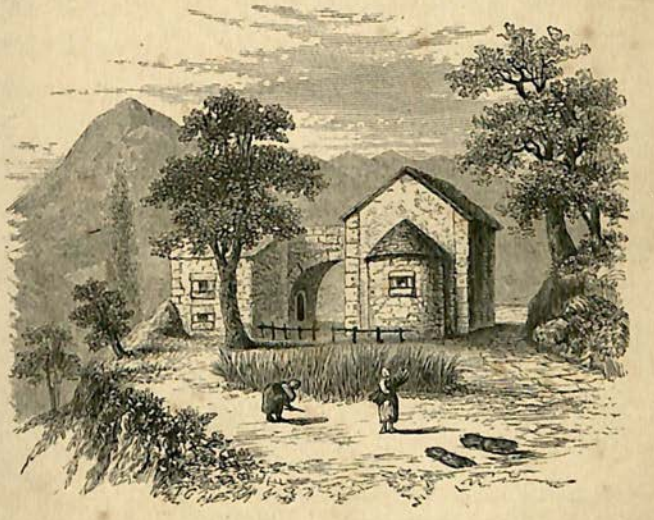
most picturesque group, kneeling on large stones at the brook washing garments in the limpid stream, while sunlight falls through the trees in chequered beams, lighting up their coloured kerchiefs and blue gowns. At eventide they go to the fountain, as Rebecca and her companions did when Eliezer met them, and return balancing full vases of shining copper on their heads as they tread the ancient paving stones with a majestic walk worthy of the daughters of a kingly race.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD MOUNTAIN CHURCH.

June 17.—About a quarter of a mile from us, on the old packhorse road, is a curious relic of antiquity, a tiny, quaint old church, called the "Pieve," said to have been built in the 11th century by the Countess Matilda, who was ruler of Tuscany at that time, and very devoted to the Church. It is a long, narrow building; a single nave without arches or aisles; built of large blocks of stone fitted and dovetailed into each other with a precision which is almost Etruscan. One single stone in the northern wall is sculptured with what the peasants call a "*girigogolo*," a kind of endless plaited knot. The priest whom we asked one day to explain the meaning of this curious stone, said it was a "Solomon's knot," and is used in many of the ancient churches. He seemed to consider it a charm, but it is more likely to have an allegorical meaning connected with the endless and mysterious works of God.

The Pieve has a tiny round apse at the east end, a miniature choir behind the high altar. The roof of the apse is formed of irregular flat stones, laid one over the other, and from the stones two rose trees spring and intertwine their long branches. Aunt Louisa gravely announced to the Antiquary that she had discovered an interesting



THE OLD MOUNTAIN CHURCH OF THE PIEVE, BUILT 1100.

archæological fact, viz. that the grave of "Ladye Nancie and Lord Ronald" was in this very Church, for—

> "Ladye Nancie they laid in the choir;
> And out of her bosom there sprung a white rose,
> And out of his a sweet brier."

The Antiquary pooh-poohing this, she declared her intention of writing a learned article to prove the Italian origin of that English ballad.

The façade is remarkable for an external pulpit with a flight of stone steps ascending to it. External pulpits are a feature in many of the mediæval Italian churches, and are no doubt preferable in the summer evenings, or when the congregation is very large. The preacher in this little mountain *pergamo* must have had great inspiration from nature; for before him opens out the valley of the Lima, with its mountains clad in purple and gold, while on all sides, "in verdure clad and strength arrayed," the hills rise protectingly, and the cornfields and green pastures are spread at his feet. The Pieve is now a church without a parish, and is only opened three times a year, when processions take place to it from Piteglio. The interior is perfectly clean, but bare; only the high altar is kept up, being adorned with faded flowers and old candlesticks. A stone bench runs entirely round the nave. This interested the Antiquary, who said he had observed it in many churches of early construction, up to the time of Giotto.

He was very anxious to get at the history of the Pieve, and this evening we happened to meet the

priest of Piteglio near the spot, and took him into conference. He tells us there are no archives preserved, if even any were kept. He has a few old registers in quaint Latin which nobody can read; but he believes there is not much about the Pieve even in them. There were once, so tradition says, a number of houses here, but scarcely a trace of masonry remains now in the cornfields round the church. When this was a village, Piteglio on its green knoll was the castle-fortress of the lord of the soil, from which he used to make raids upon the people of Popiglio, the village across the valley with its two ruined towers above it. (If ever there are two towns on opposite hills in the mountains, be sure they are hereditary foes.) But gradually the castle became disused, and people made use of its stones to build more peaceable habitations, till Piteglio took its place as the town, and the Pieve was deserted. He pointed out to us, as we looked across the little dell to Piteglio, that there were still portions of the old castle wall remaining, and said that the tower of the present church was once the Keep of the fortress.

"And who takes the revenues from the Pieve now?" inquired the Antiquary.

"I do," modestly replied the curé, "or hope to do so soon; for after ten years' curateship they

have made me rector, and I shall be installed on the Festa of Maria in August."

Then he showed us, with natural pride, the extent of his glebe lands, nearly half the slopes of the little dell, and large tracts of chestnut forest on the mountains. He will be a rich rector; and we congratulated him heartily, for his courteous simplicity had quite won our hearts. The care of his land is committed to the charge of a family of *contadini*, six stalwart brothers and a sister, who live in the ancient house of the priest adjoining the Pieve, from which it is separated by a picturesque archway.

CHAPTER IX.

TAKING LIKENESSES.

June 18.—This is the story of our house-mother's adventure. We had left her calmly sketching at the Pieve while we took a further walk, but she had not long been there when it began to rain, and the *contadina* from the adjoining cottage ran out to beg her to take shelter within. The mother found the house as old as the church, the interior being lined with wood as black as ebony. The wooden stairs lead up almost like a ladder from the very middle of the room to the upper floor, and so worn are the boards of the ceiling that one can see through the cracks to the room above.

The young peasant said that her name was Annina, and then she and an old woman, who had also come in for shelter, put the mother through a complete catechism, two little girls standing near listening open mouthed; while she answered as much or as little as she chose to such questions as, Where did she live? How many children had

she? Did she like the Villa? How many servants had she? etc., etc.

They looked at each other, and the old one said, half resentfully, "Now, only think how unequal things are! Whether we are ill or well, we've got to work like slaves, or we should not have so much as a bit of *necci* (chestnut cake) to put in our mouths; and you, signora," she said, looking at the mother inquiringly, "have nothing whatever to do, I suppose, and might lie in bed all day if you chose."

The mother emphatically told them that she had a great deal to do. Did they think it nothing to manage a house of a dozen people, and make the clothes of five children?

They laughed, and owned that girls—meaning servants—were a great deal of trouble to keep at their work (here Annina glanced at her two little shepherdesses); "and if the signora made all the children's things, why then——" an eloquent pause did duty for the rest of the sentence, which might be interpreted into, "why then, you are not such a fine lady as we thought you."

To change the conversation she proposed to make a sketch of the pretty Annina as she sat spinning.

The girl was delighted, and settled herself into a

chair with an inane smile on her face, having first begged to be allowed to put on her festal dress, which would of course have spoiled the picture. The rain having ceased, the old woman went away to her work in the fields, no doubt telling all her friends what was going on at Annina's, for ten minutes after a heavy country girl entered. She had the broad nose of an African, the large thick mouth of a negro, and the small eyes and high cheek bones of a Tartar. She came in with an awkward shyness, nodded at Annina, grinned at the little shepherdesses, and then stood still, arms on her hips, before the mother, saying uncouthly, "You are taking likenesses, I hear; so I've come to have mine done too."

"Are you?" laughed Annina. "Sit here then: hold my spindle, and place yourself *so*," putting her in the selfsame attitude she had herself assumed, and looking at the signora for approval.

The mother smiled, and finding herself looked on in the light of an itinerant photographer, accepted the situation. The classic attitude, however well suited to Annina's regular profile and braided coronal of hair, was not becoming to the present subject; so she proposed that Filomena should be taken in a different style, and espying a winding-wheel in a dark corner, she set her to

wind wool. No sooner was this unique portrait sketched in, than one of the little sheep girls usurped the chair, and in her turn put herself into position.

"Go through with a thing" being a favourite maxim of the mother's, she resigned herself to the inevitable, and patiently turned over a new leaf.

Filomena having critically inspected her own likeness, and laughed immoderately at it, placed herself behind the artist's chair, ejaculating thus as the sketch proceeded: "Madonna mia! Ermilia, if she isn't putting in even your apron pocket! Oh dear! now she is doing your boots! Oh, and I can see all the buttons. Did any one ever see the like?" Here an irrepressible giggle choked the girl.

"When will you finish the portraits and let us have them?" asked Annina, coming to business.

"As soon as I have time to complete them."

"You really will give us a copy? You don't say so, and then think no more of it?"

Of course the artist protested that her promises were of unexceptional trustworthiness.

"And you will make them coloured? they make so much more show (fanno assai piu figura) when painted."

That also promised—but in great doubt as to

the manner of its performance, she having only just resuscitated her school-girl knowledge of drawing,—the mother began to beat a retreat.

Filomena, still regarding her very attentively with her sharp Tartar eyes, asked, "Are all ladies like you?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I've never seen a foreign signora before. But I thought they were very proud, and that I should be afraid to speak to them; but if they are all like you, I see no need to be afraid, you are quite *homely*" (alla mano).

So with this compliment our "artist in spite of herself" took her departure homewards. The path skirts all the little holdings of the villagers, and many were the primitive agricultural industries she saw on her way. Fiore was mounted high on an acacia tree in his meadows, lopping off branches which fell at the foot of the tree, where Rosa, his wife, with the children, picked them up and made a bundle which Rosa would afterwards carry home on her head to feed the cows in the stall.

The brothers Bettoni were earthing up their potatoes and irrigating their beanfields. They had made a conduit of bark taken off whole from the poplar trees; and this primitive water-course brought the stream from the fountain down across

the grass and poured it over the bank into the beanfield. A group of little boys, with Harry among them, were busy making amateur water-works, one of the ingenious men having placed a tiny wheel under a little cascade where the water fell from one pipe to another on a lower level.

At the brook Beppa and Matilde were kneeling on the stepping-stones to wash their linen in the stream. They rub it on the stones, flap it, beat it, do anything and everything, in fact, except wash it with the hands as an Englishwoman would do.

Giuditta, the dairywoman, was spreading out yards of linen, lately woven, to bleach on the grass bank by her cornfield; and near the piazza, Pietro was to be seen leading his beloved little pony to water at the brook. This pony is the seeming object of Pietro's life: three times a day it is taken to the brook, and twice to the fields and hedgerows to feed, his master waiting its pleasure with exemplary patience. He employs his time in manufacturing toys for the children, or cutting tiny little shrines out of a soft stone, a kind of *tufo*, found here. When first dug up this stone is soft as soap, and can be cut with a knife; it hardens in the air, and when dry is liable to crumble. Pietro makes all kinds of pretty little things in it.

CHAPTER X.

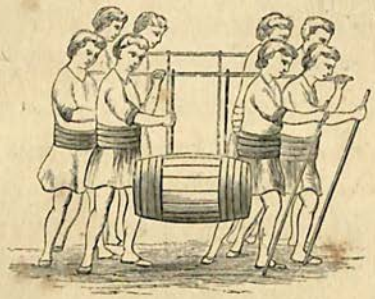
DOING THE LIONS OF PITEGLIO.

June 19.—A merry party of eight, including some of the children, are starting, armed with sketch books, for a walk to Piteglio. It has been the object of our ambition for some days to have a near view of that village, which makes such a picturesque object in the middle distance of our landscape. From the Villa it seems a cluster of brown and red houses round a pretty church tower perched on the cone of a circular hill, which rises green and fresh out of the valley of the Limano.

There are two ways to reach it: the fine new road made by modern engineers, which winds round the sides of the mountains, sacrificing distance and time to gain a more level route; and the old mule track, which has been used for centuries by the mountaineers, and which leads past the ancient church of the Pieve. As

we near this, a man advances toward us with a broad smile on his face.

"This man looks happy," I remark, and in fact the smile widens as he approaches, when to our astonishment he stops with a polite "Good day to the Signoria;" then turning to the mother he adds, "The signora will, I am sure, do an act of kindness also to me. She took those girls'



ROMAN PHALANGARI. (*From an ancient lamp.*)

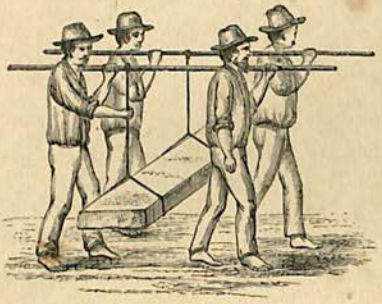
likenesses yesterday," with a backward jerk of his thumb toward the Pieve; "will she also take that of my little boy, she will find him a good-looking little fellow?" The smile had by this time become so insinuating that it must have been a hard heart that could refuse this proud father's request.

The mother gets very much quizzed as we proceed.

"You are following Byron's example," laughs Aunt Louisa. "You wake and find yourself famous."

"For daubs," adds the mother, thinking of the caricatures she had perpetrated of the girls, and for which they were so grateful that they politely asked the price!

We descend the steep little paved road into



MASONS BUILDING HARRY'S BRIDGE.

the valley, cross the bed of the mountain torrent, where our village friends, Annibale and Narciso Lenini are building a bridge. This bridge has become of importance in our family annals, for little Harry, suddenly developing a talent for engineering, insists on going daily to inspect the progress made by his friends. And has not his name become immortal in the mountains by reason of a huge corner stone with his

initials carved on it in large letters! And did he not with great ceremony help to place the big stone! And was not his father obliged to carry a supply of red and blue paint to the bridge, to colour those letters according to Harry's artistic ideas! And is not the place known as Harry's Bridge to this day!

A slight ascent on the other side of the valley and we are in Piteglio. This mountain town has several hundred inhabitants, but is entirely destitute of either butcher, baker, mercer, or doctor. A travelling baker brings bread once a week from Pistoja, an itinerant draper devotes a day now and then to Piteglio, laying out his bales of coarse linen and *bordato*—a thick, coloured gingham worn by the peasants—on the stone seats of the village piazza. For all intermediate needs they fall back on their *necci* and their home-spun.

The houses are quaint but strong buildings, the lintels, architraves, and window-posts are all solid slabs of stone, as well as the corners of the houses. In this we can trace the descent of house architecture through the Tuscan from the Etruscan. Even the cattle stall at the Nook is built with masses of stone for the door-posts and cornering.

Piteglio houses seem built *ad libitum*, a porch,

a terrace, or a projecting room being thrown out at the convenience of the builders, and often to the inconvenience of the passers by.

Brown, or mellow black, is the prevailing colour of these smoke-tinted buildings; for here, as at the Nook, every house has its *seccatojo* (chestnut drying room), and all the cooking is done at the chimneyless fire, so that the smoke in due time proves its colouring tendencies. There are several remnants of old feudal times in Piteglio. A portion of the ancient wall of the fortifications is extant, and above it a postern door of Lombardo-Gothic architecture.

At the back of the church is a quaint piazza, which looks as if it might have been the castle courtyard. Cavernous archways, overgrown with moss and fern, are beneath the steps leading to the houses. One old house has a sculptured stone above the door. We can decipher an anvil and various blacksmith's tools on it, and a date in obsolete figures which looks like 1507 or 1307. No doubt this was the armoury of the castle.

The church on the summit of the hill is a quaint bit of architecture, having a façade of four Norman or perhaps Lombard arches, and a pretty flight of steps, flanked by stone pillars, leading to them.

The tower is very high, and artistic in form; it is built on the living rock, and has still the loop-holes of the ancient keep alternating with the more recent arched windows.

Aunt Louisa settles comfortably into a shady corner and draws forth her sketch book, the artistic friend follows her example at another angle, the children begin to look for a convenient spot for playing houses, but find it difficult, for group after group of the inhabitants approach, crowding about us as if they had never seen strangers before; and indeed not many foreigners reach that secluded place.

The bare-footed and bare-headed children, hand in hand, push each other to obtain front places. Five out of seven have their faces tied up in handkerchiefs, a phenomenon which strikes us as peculiar, till we learn that Piteglio is suffering under an epidemic of "mumps."

But the children are not allowed all the enjoyment to themselves, their mothers arrive on the scene, pull the little ones away, and come near themselves to satisfy their own curiosity ocularly and verbally.

"They are putting our church into a book!" ejaculates one.

"I suppose, signora, when you go home to

your own country, and your people ask what you have seen, you will show your book, and that will do as well as telling them all about it, eh?"

Their estimation of English ladies was highly amusing. "*Figurati*" (fancy to yourself), exclaimed a lively woman, "what talent these English have! In our country it is the men that do the pictures, but these ladies seem to know all about it as well as a man! Then they can talk our language too! Just fancy how foolish we Italians should look if we went to their country, and could not understand a word!" Then, with a sudden thought: "Do the English *contadini* (peasants) speak our language or yours, signora?"

"Oh, ours of course."

"There! I thought so! How much more clever they must be than we are, who only know our own!"

One of them suggested that as we had a queen instead of a king, perhaps that accounted for the especial cleverness of English ladies.

The mother was sketching a picturesque cottage, with an outside portico and flight of old steps. The woman who lived therein was delighted, and ran and told all her neighbours

that the lady was going to carry her house to England in her book.

She brought out a chair to render the artist more comfortable, and begged her to come in and see the interior of the house, that she might know better how to draw it,—evidently thinking a thorough knowledge of the subject was necessary.

A neat black figure comes down the piazza. It is our friend the priest, a rather young man with an extremely good face. We have seen him at the Villa, and he hastens to welcome us to his parish.

"Who will go up the tower?" the Antiquary asks after a little time.

The children, eager for anything new, are all ready for the ascent. Aunt Louisa sacrifices a half-washed-in sky, and joins the party with one or two others.

But five minutes later a number of defaulters issue from the tower door. The little girls run out, saying they don't like the steps; and then their elders descend, leaving the gentlemen and undaunted Aunt Louisa to achieve the feat alone.

The steps consist of a succession of shaky ladders, some of them wanting rungs; and as

the centre is all open, it requires a strong head to ascend the higher ones. Aunt Louisa not only accomplishes it, but rings the bells in token of her arrival.

Then we visit the church,—the aborigines, babies and all, following us. Some of the party ascend the narrow steps to the organ-loft. Such a queer old organ, with a case of worm-eaten, rough boards; a set of keys, which rattle like bones, and are as yellow as boxwood; stops whose handles are gone, and some are replaced with string. Aunt Louisa plays a bit of Mozart, and the people, who nearly fill the little nave, all listen decorously as if a mass were being celebrated.

In the choir are one or two valuable books, with mediæval illuminations in them. And over the altar is a reliquary, containing a very curious relic,—it is a bit of linen which has been dipped in the milk of the Virgin! To what lengths will superstition go!

Then we are handed over to another priest—or rather *frate*—who takes us to his house, which is at the foot of a steep descent on the farther side of the village. The *frate's* name is the same as the ancient owners of the Villa. He says there are twenty families of that name in Piteglio, and none of them are aware of being descendants of

the former lords of the Nook. It is a curious speculation whether the place derives its name from the people or the people from the place.

The hospitable *frate* shows us up to his rooms, where he has a little polyglot library,—for he has travelled, and even speaks English. But the things we came to see chiefly are two remnants of antiquity.

One is the cover of a *thurible*, in the form of a temple, beautifully worked in bronze. It is of 15th century workmanship.

The other is a mould for making sacramental wafers. It is like a pair of tongs, with the inside of the plates which press them cut into some suitable design. In this case the design is a cross and the arms of the Nook (two ears of millet seed). It appears that no less than three of the family which owned our Villa have been Priors of Piteglio, one of whom was the priest Domenico who did the stonework of the chapel in 1537.

Just outside the *frate's* house is an ancient fountain of one arch of large blocks of stone. A washing-cistern adjoins it on one side, and on the other a modern shrine to the Madonna, which, the *frate* tells us, his grandfather erected at his own expense. The old fountain bears

the date of 1517. As we stand there several women and girls come to fetch water, fill their elegant Etruscan-looking copper *mezzine*, and walk off, balancing them gracefully on their heads.

CHAPTER XI.

CORPUS DOMINI.

June 20.—Yesterday there was a grand culling of flowers by the peasant children, who were evidently acting under orders in making the tour of the rose hedge of the lawn. They had large scissors tied round their waists, and filled their little aprons with the largest roses, cut off close without stalks. The very communistic views of the parish as regards the lawn of the Villa are highly amusing; and as their part ownership in it is probably a time-honoured institution, we have not ventured to dispute the question.

Other children went farther afield, and came home laden with Marguerite daisies, blue cornflowers, scabious, and yellow sun cistus. We hear that to-day, being the great Italian festival of Corpus Domini, there is to be a grand procession at Piteglio. The bells are ringing merrily adown the valley, and the far-off echo of Popiglio bells mingle with them as they ring up the dell. A

maiden with the brightest of coral necklaces, hurrying along candle in hand, tells us the procession has already left the church; and we hasten after her down the winding path amid the green corn, over the rapid torrent, and up the ferny ledge beneath the chestnut trees on the other side, reaching the piazza breathless to take our place near the kneeling crowd. The roses and flower petals which the children had gathered strew the path by which the procession has just passed.

The stones are damp, for it has rained half the morning, but the simple spirit of reverence does not regard discomfort. The whole population of the village, old men, young men, mothers, maidens, and children, are on their knees, a gentle gravity and reverence on their simple faces. At the farther end of the piazza is a shrine of the Madonna; a temporary altar has been made here, candles lighted, and the whole procession halts while the priest performs some function. A very imposing pageant it looks in the distance. The two priests in *pianete*, whose rich gold embroidery dates from the 16th century, are beneath a *baldacchino* of gold brocade with bullion tassels, supported by six acolytes in white. A crowd of white-robed men bearing torches; the great standard, of which Piteglio has

been proud for 300 years; a crucifix under a gold worked canopy; rose-decked pictures, etc., etc., form a gay mass of colour as they stand surrounded by the quaint houses of blackened stone on all sides of them.

Now the prayer is over, the lookers-on rise from their knees, and begin to divide their glances between our party and the procession, till the latter moves towards us again on the flower-carpeted path. First come the maidens, the pretty Adele Lenini, bearing a large picture; then the matrons, all carrying candles. A good idea of their social standing may be obtained by observing the size of their candles, which are the result of private purchase. Those of the well-to-do being of a large size with an ornamental holder; while their poorer neighbours carry farthing rushlights, or their Italian equivalent. Little children toddle along with a hand on the end of "mother's candles," and look as if the success of the *festa* depended on their tiny efforts. Several of our peasant friends venture to give us a nod or smile as they pass.

The men, who follow next, being clad in a kind of surplice made of home-spun white linen, girded round the waist, seem to magnify the dignity of their office much more than their womankind, who

have no especial vestments. They walk by in long file, bearing their candles in solemn silence, and vouchsafe no recognition. Perhaps the feeling that the great satin *stendardo*, with its splendid gold embroidery, is being borne by one of their number in front of them, and the great crucifix follows them in the rear, impresses them with due and becoming awe.

Now come the priests under their gorgeous canopy. Our friend, the simple-minded parish *curé*, is grand as an archbishop, carrying his ostensorio of cinque-cento work in silver, and looking quite portly in his massive embroidered vestments.

The procession having passed, the men of the crowd draw back and let the women follow it first, they bringing up the rear. There is no pushing or crowding for the nearest places, the innate mountain politeness rules all. We take a shorter road, and get to the church in time to see the procession arrive. The women enter first and are all seated before the men come in, the crowd outside waits decorously till priests and all have passed, and then come in with perfect order. The *baldacchino* is carried to a side chapel, and the priest proceeds to the altar under a yellow silk umbrella held over his head by an acolyte. The great standard, the pictures, crucifix, and swaying lamps on poles are

all grouped round the altar. The old organ peals, clashes, and *roulades* under the fingers of some native genius,—the congregation shout an earnest "Te Deum," and then by degrees disperse. Candles are extinguished, white robes taken off in the vestry, and our friends come out in every-day guise, and feel enabled to recognise us now. We linger a little to look at the altar paintings, mostly of the time of the decadence, at the curious old tombstones in the floor, and to take a peep into the sacristy, to admire once more the beautiful raised gold work on the huge flag. The sacristan tells us of hidden treasures in the shape of antique vestments in the wardrobes, and goes off to call the priest, who comes, in his plain black cassock, welcomes us with both hands, and opens all his treasures. There are a cinque-cento stole and pianeta, embroidered with lovely nature-tinted flowers, and edged with gold lace. An antique set of vestments in flowered brocade, and another embroidered in gold. All very old as regards the original fabric, but the embroidery still untarnished.

As we looked out from the two low windows of the sacristy, can we wonder at the simple earnestness of these people who live amidst such a glorious nature? Mountains stretching on all

sides, clothed to their summits with fresh green foliage, verdant fields, terrace below terrace, down into the lovely valley. Everything to raise the mind to the God of unalloyed nature, nothing to suggest sin or a low thought.

Same day, evening.—In the afternoon all the young men of the village assemble on our lawn, where is a huge old chestnut tree, to play the game of *altalena*, or swinging. The agile Giulio climbed the tree and passed a long rope over one of the strongest branches, and then slid down its doubled strand. It was tied at the bottom, and in this primitive swing they amused themselves and us for an hour. It was considered a great feat to climb the rope and touch the high branch, the rope pendulating all the time. The younger and more active men having performed marvels of agility, the solemn, wooden-featured Luigi advanced to try his prowess. His first achievement was to get himself into a slip noose which tightened round his legs, and he had to be ignominiously released by his laughing rivals. Not to be daunted, our friend tried the climbing feat, but when by great exertion, during which his eyes became more glassy than ever, he had reached the top, he chanced to grasp only one rope instead of both, and came down with a run which was more surprising than agreeable. The villagers told us

that it is a custom to play *altalena* on certain summer *festas*, but they did not know if it had any special significance.

The Antiquary, however, knew better. The swing is a most ancient game. A picture was found at Pompeii of a lady swinging. Festus speaks of it as a favourite amusement among the ancients. It is said to be an Oscan game. Micali ("Popoli Antichi," xxii. 147) tells us the Latins celebrated the feasts on Monte Albano with this "woodland game" (*giuoco boschereccio*).

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF A QUARREL.

June 22.—"Oh, signora! have you something to bring one of the women to life again? she has been in a swoon for half an hour," exclaims our nurse.

Away hies "the mother," with the brandy and sal-volatile in her hand, to the sick woman's house, closely followed by the Antiquary. The invalid is the unmarried sister of the brothers Lenini, who all live in one house, each brother having a floor of two rooms. It appears that this sister had a dispute last night with some other member of the family, and the agitation must in some way have affected her heart. "The mother" finds her stretched on the bed in a neat clean room with all her relations and friends crowded round her. There she lies, still and with set features; brown, strongly marked features, seamed with hard work, but now rigid as a corpse; she does not even breathe perceptibly. Her hands and feet are cold as marble;

the only sign of life is a slight flutter at the heart. The brother with whom she had quarrelled sits holding her hand, calling her now and then beseechingly, but she hears no voice.

Every means in our power are tried, but in vain. The brandy gurgles in the throat, and is swallowed involuntarily, but brings no life back. Mustard fails to warm the cold feet. The Antiquary suggests medical advice, but the friends reply that "the nearest doctor is five miles away, and will not come for less than seven francs; and then, if she has not waked before he can get here, she must be indeed dead!" So they say, "If only the priest were here now!"

The priest *is* here. He has been paying his morning visits in the hamlet, and hearing of Beppa's illness, comes at this moment to see her.

In these country places the priest is not only the physician of souls, but of bodies and minds likewise. No sooner is he in the house than the frightened, helpless look on the faces of the people passes away; and though he, like ourselves, can do nothing more, they feel as if half the horror is gone; they have placed their responsibility in the hands which hold their consciences, and begin to breathe freely again.

Fully an hour afterwards the woman returned

slowly to life, very weak and shaken. This is the only semblance of a quarrel we have heard of; and as it has had such disastrous consequences, it is not likely to be repeated.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MOUNTAIN STORM.

June 27.—This morning we had a hailstorm, and it was a new experience. The early hours were clear and bright as usual, but about ten o'clock a strong wind began to howl round the distant mountains like the roaring of wild beasts afar off. Great masses of clouds came rolling slowly up over the hill tops and down the sides till they veiled them from view.

We stood at the window watching while one of these masses enveloped Piteglio, and as the village vanished from our sight, the wavy outlines of the cloud resolved themselves into straight perpendicular lines, and we knew it was hailing. As we watched, the pouring cloud swept onward to us like a giant white broom. In a few moments the wind roared in our faces fiercely, and we had hardly time to close the windows before the hail was upon us.

Such a howling through the house as that wind

rushed in at the open windows! such a clatter as of large stones flung with giant force at the panes, which were closed in time against it! such an utter darkness—a *white* darkness—outside and in! not even a tree on the lawn visible, nothing but that solid, whirling, driving mass of whiteness. We thought of our high, slightly built house in Florence, how it would have trembled and shaken in such a blast; but this strong old mountain villa stood it as firmly as possible. Its walls of a yard in thickness are of solid stone, and its small windows close with tight bars, so that they do not even shake. In ten minutes the thick storm-mass dissolved, the sun came out again, and the sky above was serene as ever. But the children were in ecstasies; they rushed about from the *loggia* to the *cortile* with their hands full of "diamonds" as they call them, hailstones as large as hazel nuts. "Oh, mamma!" cried Isa, "do come and look at the *cortile;* it is like Aladdin's palace." Isa lives on fairy tales be it known.

We went out, and it really was a wonderful sight. The ground was covered—in some parts heaped—with a glistening mixture of shining stones and green leaves, whirled off the trees by the storm. As the sun shone on this glittering mass,

and on the wet leaves of the trees and creeping plants clothing the walls, it indeed looked dazzling enough to be a fairy palace. But the disenchantment was in seeing the grave faces of the *contadini* as they shook their heads and said they feared their young maize and their wheat, just in ear, were all spoiled. And one by one they passed the gate to go up the mountain and look at their strips of cornfield. Not a great deal of harm has been done, however, for the storm was short.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MOUNTAIN PEDLAR.

July 28.—"Mer-cia-io! mer-cia-io! chi vuole il merciaio," echoes through the village, and the travelling mercer or pedlar, placing his bales on the stone seat at our gate, awaits his customers.

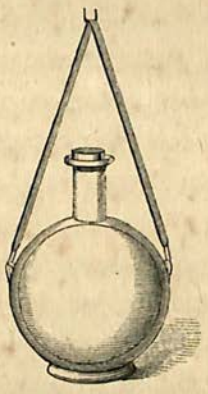
Out toddle the children and cluster like bees around the basket of toys and little saint-pictures; out run the young girls and look at the fine silk scarfs and make-believe jewellery; out step the mothers and housewives to buy their tapes and buttons; and a man or two strolls up and fingers the cigars.

"Mamma, please give me a penny to buy a whistle," cries our boy Harry.

"An' me too a penny," echoes round little Lulu. The two elders of seven and eight years old disappear mysteriously, and presently reappear, both holding on to a little purse to count their money; they have always a joint-stock company in everything. Isa likes a necklace, Ida prefers a

little picture; then they propose to buy a fan between them; but "No," says Ida, "suppose we should both get hot together."

"Well, then we could stand close together, and fan us both at one time," responds Isa decisively. The discussion continues, *pro* and *con*, so long, that before it is done kind Aunt Louisa, who while they have been talking has been kneeling on the



OIL VASE CARRIED BY OIL-SELLING PEDLAR IN THE MOUNTAINS.

stones before the pedlar's basket, comes up with a fan in each hand.

"Oh, thank you, *thank* you, Aunt Louie! Our money was only enough for one," exclaims Isa.

"One each! one each! Oh, *how* nice!" cries Ida, dancing round the piazza.

So away they go to satisfy their smaller desires. Isa buys a red wooden necklace, which looks like

coral, and Ida a little picture in a leaden frame. It is a Madonna, crowned, and the mother begs her to change it for a saint, or something else less papistical. Harry's penny has bought two whistles, so he and his little *contadino* friend Johnny, march up and down amongst the crowd, adding more to the noise than the harmony.

The poor old bent grandmother toils up with the terrible grand-nephew clinging to her skirts. She looks longingly at a pile of head kerchiefs, but shakes her palsied head and sighs; she has no money, nor means of earning it. Her head is covered with a very old shabby *pezzuola*, and the inspiration takes me to give the three Fates new head-gear. I choose three,—a brown, a red, and a blue one,—and look around me to distribute them appropriately. Atropos shall have the brown one, a grave colour that harmonises with her fixed melancholy. Clotho, who is coming up with the ever-busy distaff and spindle in her hands, shall wreathe her bright old face and white curls in the scarlet one; and Lachesis shall be made happy with the blue. In a moment the three old heads are all grouped together, comparing and admiring their new treasures.

Pietro's three pretty daughters have turned over a whole heap of stuffs to find something for the

loose *camicietti* bodies they wear. But the young ladies are difficult to please, and say the pedlar does not bring pretty stuffs; so they buy nothing, to the man's mortification.

"Oh, merciao! have you a coral horn?" exclaims one of the women.

These horns are little branches of coral set in gold or silver gilt, and are used as a charm against the evil eye by the Italians.

"Yes, I have one or two left. What is it for, is anything wrong?"

"My Silvio has worms, I believe,—or else that old woman at Pitcglio *looked* at him on Sunday,—for he won't eat and he won't sleep; whichever it is, a bit of coral is the best thing. I put my necklace round his neck last night, but I am afraid he'll break it and lose the beads." It takes a great deal of bargaining to buy the bit of coral, but at last it is safely hung round the child's neck, tucked in under his dress, and the mother is happy.

Superstition is very rife in the mountains, the people here have a profound belief in witches and in the evil eye, in miracles and miraculous Madonne.

Meanwhile a group of young men in the background is poring over a quantity of large

printed sheets of paper. They are selecting songs which they will sing in chorus as they take their walks in parties on *festas*. Here are a few headings: "The Ballad of Genoveffa and Siegfried," a beautiful Rhine legend. "The Witch of Prato." "The Dreadful Story of a Mother who Killed her two Innocent Babes." "Pia dei Tolomei," a mediæval Florentine legend. "A True Account of how a Young Man went for a Ride in the Air on a Goat." "Abelard and Heloise." "Story of Love turned to Hate, and the Awful Deed that came of it."

I wonder which of all this varied list will suit the taste of the youths, but have not long to doubt. Witchcraft carries the day, and "the young man and the goat"—who is of course a witch—is purchased by unanimous consent.

Even children's superstitions are different here to what they are in Florence. In all lands the ladybird is an object of children's myths. In England the little ones cruelly inform her that "her house is burnt down and her children all gone." At Florence they say,—

> "Lucia, Lucia, vai a Roma,
> Mi compra un vezzo e una corona."
>
> Bird of light, go to Rome,
> Buy me a necklace and a rosary.

This morning I heard one of the pretty little *contadini* who was playing with the children say to a ladybird on her little brown fingers :—

"Pecorina d'oro, pecorina d'oro,
Insegna mi la via al Paradiso."

Golden lamb, golden lamb,
Show me the way to Paradise.

Then she turned to Isa and added, "If we want to go to Paradise, we must always say that when we see a ladybird."

I have also found our game of "all round the mulberry bush" here. The children play it under the chestnut trees with as much spirit as ours do in their nurseries.

I have also found an ancient English lullaby, which is commonly used in Sardinia. One of the men, who went there for a winter's work, brought it back and taught it to his children. They sing it in Tuscan, thus :—

"Sul letto mio son quattro angoli,
E quattro angeli vi son posti ;
Due a pie e due a capo
E nostra Signora mi sta accosto."

Translated simply, we recognise our old friend—

Four corners to my bed,
Four angels round my head,
Two at head and two at feet, etc.

I do not remember the last line of the English one, but I have no doubt there is just the national difference of placing one of the persons of the Holy Trinity instead of the Madonna as guardian of the childish slumbers. Similitudes are also very frequent between English and Italian proverbs, and popular superstitions. Nearly every person we meet in these mountain paths gives us a valedictory injunction of "Faccia a modo sa!" ("Walk carefully"), and often ends with "Chi va piano va sano," an Italian rendering of "Fair and softly go far in a day." One day I was hurrying quickly out of the house, and caught my dress in some nail, thereby tearing it. Luigi who was standing at the gate, smiled and said, "La furia vuol adagio," a proverb kindred to our "More haste, worse speed."

The Tuscans have also the universal dislike of beginning any journey on Friday; they include also Tuesday as an unpropitious day.

CHAPTER XV.

VILLAGE BRIDES AND LOVERS.

July 1.—This morning, hearing that Matilde is ill, we go over to pay her a visit. Matilde is the one year's bride of Annibale, the mason brother of the Lenini. She is the neatest and brightest little woman in the village, and a great favourite of Isa and Ida, who go to see her make bread and *necci*, help her to pick her beans on the hillside, and take the greatest interest in all her household arrangements. The room where Matilde lies on her bed is a picture of neatness. Instead of being black with smoke, as all the other houses are, Annibale has plastered and stencilled the walls, and made quite a bower for his *sposa*. She has even a modern chest of drawers instead of the old oaken chests where her neighbours are content to lay by their best gowns and sheets; and on the drawers is a mirror, a little plaster Madonna, and two vases of calico flowers! Her

bed has a white quilt, and the sheets are of her own spinning.

Downstairs the good husband has made her a kitchen for herself instead of sharing that of her sisters-in-law. It is a separate little building thrown out from the side of the house; but the interior is a picture, her shelves are full of tin utensils, kept as bright as silver, and of shining earthenware *pentole* and jugs. The wooden bin



BRONZE CAULDRON FOUND AT POMPEII.



MATILDE'S POLENTA POT, 1878.

where she mixes her bread is white and clean, and not a speck of dirt is to be seen. Then Matilde has a *sala* opening from the kitchen, and that too is as neat and trim as only a childless housewife can keep it.

In return for all Annibale's care for her, the little housewife pays due attention to her spouse. About one o'clock she may be seen trotting past the gate with a tall bundle in a white napkin

poised on her neat little head, her busy fingers knitting as she goes. This is Annibale's dinner, which Matilde carries hot to him to the quarry, where he is hewing stones for "Harry's Bridge." On his return at night she will perhaps have a savoury *frittata*, or little shape of home-made cheese, ready for his supper. Ida has discovered, also, that Matilde makes hot coffee for him before he goes away in the morning, and Ida opines that Matilde is richer than her neighbours, for "nobody else drinks coffee with sugar in it," she says.

Speaking of brides brings us, by a natural transition, to lovers. It is my fate to attract the spontaneous confidence of that romantic *genus*, and of course, amid this little community, where nature reigns supreme, I have discovered one or two pretty little love stories. Yesterday, sitting at work by the fountain of the rustic Narcissus, we watched the "village Adonis," Giulio, at work in his garden, and on our admiring the profusion of flowers there, he asked us to enter.

What a delightful little old-fashioned garden it was! We seemed transported back to the quaint parterres of our great grandmothers. There were gillyflowers, clove pinks, hollyhocks, and double cowslips, cockscombs, mignonnette, cabbage roses,

and honeysuckle, larkspurs, nasturtiums, and gigantic sunflowers, all blooming in a mass of gorgeous tanglement within a few square yards of paling.

Giulio blushed his appreciation of our delight, and told us how he spent all his spare time in weeding and watering this little Eden; and then, reddening again, added, "It was the only consolation I had when things went badly with me." A look of sympathetic inquiry on our faces was enough; Giulio, glancing round to see that none of his neighbours were near, launched out into the story of his troubles.

He had loved a certain maiden of Piteglio for five years, and she had always loved him; but her father was a rich man, as the dwellers in the mountains count riches. He had larger chestnut woods than his neighbours and more productive cornlands. His flocks were many, and he had also some money in the bank. Being thus wealthy he expected riches to come into the family by marriage; and though Giulio Bettoni was comfortably off for a peasant, he was not grand enough to suit this stern parent, who forbade his pretty daughter to think of him more. The faithful Flaminia, however, was equal to the occasion, she told her father "she would never

marry *without* his consent, because she knew obedience was due to him, but she would remain single."

The father found several rich "*occasioni*," *i.e.* matches, for her; "but," said Giulio, "this was always her answer to them." Then he added in a confidential whisper, "I think he will come round after all. It cannot be but that five years constancy *must* be rewarded. I always go on with my garden. Flaminia will pick the flowers some day. Mother is very anxious for it, that is one good thing."

The strong-minded "Lachesis" is the mother; and indeed her will is a power in any of the events of the fates she rules. In this case she is anxious to secure a rich wife for her youngest son, but she looks with a different eye on the choice of the eldest, the serious Luigi.

For that interesting character, whose face is wooden, whose heart is golden, and whose mind is as poetic as his appearance is prosaic, is in love, as well as his Adonis of a younger brother. But Luigi has not had the luck to fall in love with an heiress; no, he is only silently devoted to the prettiest of Pietro's trio of lasses, and Lachesis sets her fateful face dead against the match.

Luigi is not a gardener, so he cannot grow

roses for his beloved, but he has built her a house. The new cottage by the "Narcissus fountain," which stands by Giulio's garden, is the work of his hands; he has hewn architraves and lintels of solid stone; has sculptured his ancient padroni's arms and his own name on a slab in the façade, and cut a pretty little shrine to the Madonna, whose name his love inherits; and the shrine of Mary is over his door. The rooms are all stencilled with coloured borders, in the style Annibale has imported into the village. Year after year, at his leisure times, Luigi, with a friend or two, has laboured at this house, which is now complete and stuccoed on its exterior with a celestial blue. No doubt thoughts of Maria have entered into the walls with the very stones; but his mother refuses to receive Maria into the family, and he has not courage to take his fate into his own hands, or to bring her as an unwelcome abider at the patriarchal hearthstone.

So poor Luigi reads his Tasso and loves in silence. We see him sitting at the gate, following wistfully with his eyes the figure of Maria as she passes to and from the fountain with her copper *mezzina* of water on her head, or as she and her laughing sisters go by to mass on *festas*, smart in their coral necklaces and neatly

braided hair. And Mary, giving *us* a pleasant smile, casts down her eyes and blushes as she passes the stolid-looking Luigi. Tuscan peasants rarely marry out of their own rank or province; this seems a lingering tradition of the old *tribu*, and the ancient statutes which forbade marriage with foreigners. There is a proverb which says, "*Moglie e buoi de' paesi tuoi.*" ("Wives and oxen from your native land").

The girls here have a *stornello* to much the same effect:—

"*Pampani e uva*
E la mia mamma sempre lo diceva
L'amor del forestiero poco dura."

"Vine leaves and grapes!
My mother always told me
Stranger's love will never last."

The word "*forestiero*," or "foreign," in Tuscan, means not only strangers of another kingdom but even of another province.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CHESTNUT EATERS.

July 8.—How much more easy life is in a state of simplicity than civilization has made it in great communities! I half envy these country people their quiet life, their simple dependence on nature, their freedom from toil, moil, and worry. They till their own ground, are their own agriculturists, masons, and carpenters; their wives are dairywomen, spinners, weavers, cooks, etc.; and yet nobody ever seems in a hurry, and none are overworked. They have no masters to grind a certain number of hours' labour out of them in a day. They work when they like, and give the landowner half their corn and grain when harvest comes.

I often see a knot of half a dozen men sitting at our gate in the middle of the day in every attitude of repose, talking or dozing as the case may be. After a while one gets up, stretches himself, and says, "I shall go and 'saw' (*segare*)

a bit of corn," and off he strolls for his reaping hook. The word "saw" is very appropriate, for the hook is a blunt one, and literally saws through an armful of grain at a time. The women here do a great deal of the corn-cutting and other field work. Presently a second departs to cut some green stuff for the cows. Mountain cows and horses by no means live on grass or even hay, they eat the young leaves of maize, branches of acacia, mountain ash, poplar, and any other green leaves that come first to hand. In the winter they live on dried leaves and ferns.

Then three who are left propose to return to the threshing-floor, but wait another quarter of an hour for a fourth, after which the measured strokes of the flail resound for some time, till they all go to rest again.

Threshing has been going on now, as well as corn-cutting, for some days. All the work here is done on a mutual assistance system which is refreshingly fraternal. When the brothers Bettoni have to thresh, the brothers Lenini and Andrucci all assist. Then when the Lenini turn comes, the Bettoni lend their threshing-floor and assistance; and so on all round. If the Bettoni house is out of repair, Annibale comes and gives a day's work; while if he is in want of a chair or table,

his friend Fiore Andrucci is perfectly willing to make it. For all their corporeal needs, surrounding nature suffices. Each family has some sheep, which supply wool for their stockings and flannels. A girl takes the flock out in the woods to feed all the day, during which time she spins a good distaff full of wool.

Some families have one or two cows, which supply milk, butter, and cheese, unless they prefer to sell those commodities in the nearest market town. The cows are useful in finding a great deal of employment for the women, and sometimes also the men. The poor animals live in stalls, but are taken out, like children by their nurses, to run in the fields twice a day; but it seems of the greatest importance that a guardian should carefully watch their steps whilst feeding. Old Lachesis generally requires the attendance of one of her sons, usually the mild Giorgio, who has to watch and follow one cow, while she with a switch overrules the actions of the other; if it takes three steps at a time instead of two, or if it goes its own way instead of hers, the poor beast is soon brought to order by strange cries and switchings. The Lenini's cows are just as carefully but less sternly watched by Giuditta, who follows them as they graze, keeping a few

yards behind and spinning all the while. The women and children of the parish have a wholesome fear of the cows, and open their eyes in amazement at one of our party who pets them very much. All the inhabitants turned out one evening when Giuditta's cows had a fight, and no one was found brave enough to part them. They were shut up in their stalls for days after.

A goat, which the poorest woman in the parish takes care of, supplies them with a hard cheese and *ricotta*, a kind of curd made of goat's milk; while when their stock of corn is exhausted, the chestnut-woods which stretch out on all sides of them, covering the mountains with verdure, do all the rest. The chestnut flour is their true staff of life; and thanks to Providence there is no stint. They live nearly all the year on *necci*, or chestnut-flour cakes, every housewife making each morning a sufficient supply for the day. Their living is varied a little in summer, when the fresh vegetables come; but meat never enters into their bill of fare.

This morning Isa came running in exclaiming, "Mamma, if you want to know how *necci* are made, Gigia is baking them now. Do come, it is so curious!"

We all followed the child to the house of the

Bettoni, a substantial abode behind the church. The entrance is filled with solid presses of wood, which Isa, who has made herself acquainted with everything, informed us are all filled with chestnut flour. Passing through the house to a quaint garden with a shady vine *pergola* and picturesque stone fountain, we entered another door leading into a most curious place,—a kind of kitchen without a chimney.

The walls, floor, and ceiling are all of one uniform tint of shining black.

It took us some time to get accustomed to the smoke, but by degrees we perceived a square enclosure in the centre of the floor, marked by upright bricks placed round, this formed the fireplace. The smoke from the wood fire circled round and round, some escaped at the window, some at the door, and some went up through the blackened logs of the ceiling, to the room above. On a low seat by the fire sat one of the three old women we have named the Fates. This morning Lachesis looked more like one of the witches in Macbeth at her unholy cauldron. In her hand she held a pair of tongs, with which she took a flat stone out of the fire and placed it on a pile of cakes and leaves in an iron frame.

We watched her as she went through the

process. A huge wooden bowl of paste, about the consistence of thick cream, stood on one side of her. This is made with chestnut flour and water, and is of a pinkish hue; close to the bowl was a basket of the large fresh green leaves of the chestnut tree.

She laid three leaves on the pile of hot stones; a large ladle full of the paste on the leaves,



WOMAN MAKING "NECCI."

then more leaves, and a hot round stone from the fire to cover it. So on till the frame is full and the paste all consumed.

"How do you cook them?" we asked.

"They are cooking now, signora," she said; "the hot stones bake them enough."

After a few minutes she unpacked the pile, putting the stones back to the fireplace, the leaves

she threw away. The cakes, now of a pinkish brown colour, and the consistence of leather, she placed in a basket, in a clean white cloth; not, however, without pressing us to accept one or two of them, which to escape eating we told her we would take home and put on our breakfast table.

Necci decidedly require a peculiar organization to digest them. Every effort on the part of inhabitants of the lower earth to eat this food of the dwellers on high, results in signal failure. The children are constantly having attacks of indigestion owing to their infatuation for *necci.*

The cakes being made, we had time to glance at our surroundings. I looked through the logs of the roof, and wondered if the people who inhabit the room above ever fall through; but I only displayed my ignorance by asking the question, and the old woman smiled upon me before enlightening it.

"This is not a kitchen, though we use it so," she said; "it is a *seccatoio* (drying room). We dry the chestnuts here before they are sent to be ground. All the place above those poles is filled with the fresh chestnuts. Then a fire is lighted here, and they are cooked in the smoke for three days and nights. By that time the

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outer husk is as black as a coal, but it comes off very easily, and the inside is white and sweet, and ready to be ground into flour. Every mountaineer's house has a *seccatoio*."

"But does not the roof ever take fire?" we asked, looking at the charred logs over our heads.

"Sometimes; but it is put out directly. The men stay on watch all night when the fire is burning."

"Don't you ever fall asleep?" said Aunt Louisa to Luigi, who had just come in.

"No," he said, with his wooden smile; "we are generally two or three together, and we talk, or read, or sing *stornelli*."

"And do not the hot chestnuts ever fall through on your heads?" laughed Ida.

"Oh yes, signorina, often; the first day we pick up a sackful, but after that they get all baked together and don't fall any more."

On our way out he opened one of the huge presses in the entrance room. There was a perfect cave of flour. It had all hardened together into a pinkish white rock, and the daily portion had to be cut out with a hatchet or rough knife.

The garden of this *contadino's* house is a most quaint and picturesque place. A wide *pergola*, covered with a vine, stretches over a paved walk

with stone seats on each side; there is a pretty tank of water, with moss-covered stones, adorned with obelisks; and on the wall are curious stone heads, like the heads of archaic statues, the work of Luigi's chisel. At the end is a stone table; and on a terrace above, a row of primitive bee-hives, each one a trunk of a hollow tree roofed with a tile, and with round holes for entrance.

There are plenty of fruit trees here, as well as on our lawn; but, though the artistic effect is very luxurious, the product is *nil.* Cherries fall worm-eaten to the ground. Pears and apples do the same; while the grapes, soured at being brought into so cold a climate, refuse to ripen, and hang green and shrivelled on the vine. Raspberries and mountain strawberries, however, are delicious up here. The village children often bring us in large *bouquets* of strawberries, plucked in clusters on their stalks. The best raspberries are brought from the Abetone, a convent amidst the pine forests, high up on the near range of mountains.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SIGNORA'S MEDICINE CHEST.

July 12.—"The mother's" medicine chest has become an institution in the village. She has been successful in one or two simple cases of children's ailments, etc., and now the *contadini* have recourse to her on all occasions. Fiore's pet little boy, the pretty fair-headed Gianni, was ill and feverish yesterday, and the father, in despair about the child, brought him to the mother to ask advice. Her remedies of linseed plaster and some castor oil were so efficacious that Fiore made a point of coming in before going to his work to thank her almost with tears in his eyes.

"He's a dear little fellow!" said Fiore. "If anything happened to him I should never hold up my head again."

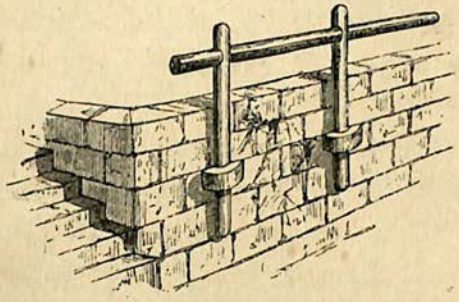
The man's devotion to the child is something quite touching; whenever he goes to work in the fields he carries little Gianni on his shoulder or in his arms, and sets him down near as he

hoes or digs. I think if he had not the child nestling about him somewhere he would be quite unhappy. It is the case here as in every other part of Italy, boys are so much more valued than girls by their parents. On once inquiring the reason of this, I was told that boys were so many bread-winners, whose earnings helped to support the family; for the Italians have a patriarchal style of living, and it is a custom for sons to remain in their father's house even after marriage. But in the case of daughters, they are so many extra and expensive mouths to feed, and have each to be endowed with a sufficient *dote*, or there is no chance of their being sought in marriage. That girls should do anything independent is an unheard-of idea in Italy, or rather was till the last few years. Since the establishment of normal schools and the telegraph, some means of existence have been found for the bravest among Italian undowered maidens.

But all this applies more to the cities of the plains.

The reason why boys are so much more valued than girls in the mountains is of quite a different kind. It is because they are so much more difficult to rear. Whether the infant male constitution is more delicate than the female, or whether

it requires a greater degree of nourishment, I do not venture to decide; but the fact is, that in these chestnut regions the mortality of boys in infancy is nearly double that of girls. The men seem robust enough, but I suppose that is to be accounted for by the fact that only the strongest grow up, and that once having passed the critical time of infancy, their constitutions have become inured to mountain living, and draw as much



WALL OF "ATROPOS'" HOUSE.

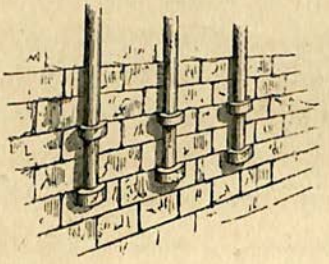
nourishment from *necci* as we do from animal food. As a rule though, men are not so long-lived as women in the Apennines, if one may judge by the great number of aged women one sees in the villages, and the very few old men.

Apropos of aged women, the poor old soul we call Atropos has at last succumbed to her infirmities and the fatigues imposed on her by

Pippino, and has taken to her bed in extreme weakness.

Of course "the mother" and her medicine chest were applied to, but we found the aged sufferer had more need of rest and nourishment than of medicine.

The house is one of the true mountain habitations,—smoke-blacked planks for flooring, smoke-blacked beams overhead, and even the gaudy



WALL OF THEATRE AT POMPEII.

Madonna on the wall is covered and toned down by fumigation. The boards of the flooring almost give way beneath our feet, so old are they. The grandmother lies on an ancient tressel bedstead; but even here, in the midst of poverty, the old civilization crops up. The sheets are coarse home-spun, but they are adorned with insertion of antique yellow thread guipure. This strange em-

broidery struck me particularly, for I had just been reading Havard's "Dead Cities of the Zuyder Zee," and this came as an illustration to the work which the Frisian women learned from their ancestors. He says, "The pillows and sheets are embroidered with open work, which is a special fabrication of the women at Marken,—white and yellow threads crossed something in the fashion of guipure."

Much interested to find this work of our Friesic foremothers in the house of a descendant of the Etruscans, we asked the story of her sheets.

"Oh, signora!" replied the grandmother, "who knows how old they are? My grandmother had them in her *corredo*, but they had been in the family for generations before that. 'Tis a kind of work people cannot do now. Of course we do not use these in common, but one likes to have a nice sheet to put on in case of a wedding or a death, or in sickness, when we receive visits (*in caso di spozalizio, o morte, o pure malattia*)." By which we understood they were in the present instance worn in our honour, and were duly gratified. She went on to say, "We have not many of our old heirlooms left. There was some beautiful lace of my grandmother's, but a gentleman from Florence came round and bought a great many old things,

and my daughter-in-law sold him that amongst others."

Then we talked about her illness. She said she felt a little stronger since taking our meat broth daily; and then she sighed, "Ah! I thought a little while ago, when I felt so tired, that God Almighty was going to let me rest, but it is clear He does not want me yet. I am not much use in this world either, except to keep Pippo from worrying his mother, but it is more than my poor crooked body is equal to. There! God will call me when He wants me, if He ever does want such a useless old thing as I."

The mother said some soothing words to her, while I sat thinking how strange a thing duty is, and how to our eyes this saving such a life for prolonged suffering seemed but a doubtful good. When we left she asked if she might kiss the signora's hand in token of her gratitude. The mother stooped and kissed the withered old face in loving heartiness. The poor soul started up, her face flushing, and caught her visitor's hand in both hers, "God bless you!" she cried; "the angels shall kiss you in heaven for that"—then she sank back on her pillow murmuring, "To kiss me on the lips! just as if I were a friend, and she loved me!—perhaps God may want me after all!"

We crept away with tears in our eyes, and the conviction in our hearts of how much happiness and good love and fellow-feeling may work in bringing the various classes of the world into true brotherhood.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLOTHO'S HIGH BREEDING.

July 13.—The brightest of the Fates, white-haired Clotho, has to-day shown her descent from a highly civilized race. Yesterday, as she sat at our gate spinning her white wool, and talking of her children and grand-children to me, she was seized with one of her fits of coughing, which left her quite exhausted.

I ran in for a glass of wine to restore her strength afterwards, which very much pleased the rosy-faced grandmother.

This morning, as we were at work on the pillared *loggia* looking on the blue mountains, Clotho was announced as having asked for the "Signora con il viso gioiale." By that complimentary description of the lady with the merry face, we understood that she wanted me, and I went to receive her. Clotho was waiting in the courtyard, for she declined to intrude into the house. There she stood, her elf locks blown about in the summer breeze,

her distaff stuck into her apron string and resting idle on her, shoulder, and one hand hid ostentatiously under her apron. On my approach she smiled a hearty greeting, and pulling out the hidden hand she displayed a bunch of the very largest strawberries mountain latitudes can produce, and gave them to me with the air of a queen bestowing a return favour on a subject. Pleased by my admiration, she said, "Yes, they are the largest I ever saw, and I thought no one else here deserved them so well as you; so I hid them from everybody to bring them safe to you, signora."

With that the idle spindle began to whirl, and Clotho walked off; having relieved her high soul of the weight of an unrequited favour, she felt a free woman again.

She is a very independent creature. Though living with her son Pietro, who has a grown-up family and is well able to support her, Clotho feels it incumbent on her to assist the household. She has for years been the *procaccia* or carrier between Piteglio and San Marcello, and every Saturday she may be seen trotting off with her laden baskets for her five mile walk, with all the strength of her eighty years. The rest of the week she gives her time to spinning wool for her three pretty grand-daughters to weave and knit.

CHAPTER XIX.

ROSA'S BABY.

July 16.—It may interest mothers to know how the ceremonies of births and baptisms are conducted in the Apennines, minus the paraphernalia of monthly nurses, doctors, etc., etc. Our friend Rosa, the wife of Fiore Andrucci, and mother of pretty little Gianni, has for several days looked very weary and unfit for her work, as she carries her pails of water from the spring, and kneels on the wet stones to wash her linen in the brook. This morning she was washing linen, and after that helped her husband to load a cart of wood; at ten o'clock she returned home.

At half-past twelve a gay christening party passes our gate on its way to the church of Piteglio. There are Giulio and the pretty Estere, Pietro's youngest daughter, in their most festal of dresses. Giulio walks before with a yellowish waistcoat, dazzling blue necktie, and the whitest of shirt sleeves. His coat is slung over his left

shoulder in the Hussar style in which these mountaineers usually wear them, or rather do not wear them. Estere, in a green flowered dress and red coral necklace, follows with Matilde, who carries the baby. This tiny specimen of humanity reclines on a cushion of antique linen embroidered in red. It has a cap of the same precious material trimmed with common cotton lace, and a long white gown over its stiff swathing. To see it we have to lift the corner of a large square of old yellow brocade, which Matilde has pinned across her chest, and which falls like a canopy over the infant.

"But whose baby is it?" we inquire.

"Rosa's, signora. It was born at half-past eleven o'clock; it is just one hour old."

Astonishment sits on our English faces. "Then she had not time to send for a doctor?"

Matilde smiles. "We poor people do not want doctors, signora. It is a chance if they could get here in time, even if we required them. When all goes well, you see, there is no need of a doctor; and if it is a bad case,—why, we must die. There is an old woman of Piteglio who comes to help, but she is not authorised. Those who are rich enough have the regular *levatrice* from Popiglio; she has a diploma, like a doctor, you know."

"But do you always take the baby out so soon after its arrival?"

"We do not like to lose any time about getting it baptized, because then we know it is safe. If by chance it died before christening—and so many things might happen to such a young child—it would go to 'Limbo' instead of to Paradise; and who knows what it would suffer there? No; as soon as a child is born we get it baptized; then it is safe, whatever happens. Besides, the witches cannot hurt it so much after that."

July 18.—We found afterwards, on visiting Rosa, that the embroidered linen cushion and cap were heirlooms of the family. Rosa said they were a large pillow-case at one time, but that her grandmother had made a smaller cushion and caps of the bit cut off; because, as she said, one always likes something nice to send the babies to church. "A piece of embroidery like that is rare now; it is only those who have kept their old family relics that have such things in these days."

The mother, who has imbibed her husband's antiquarian tastes, would willingly have purchased this beautiful bit of old work, but Rosa declined to part with it.

"No," she said; "it has belonged to my mother and grandmothers before me; we were all carried

to church on it, and all my children too. I feel as if it would be wrong to sell an old relic like that."

I need not say we respected her scruples.

She supposed the yellow brocade to be about the same age as the embroidery. Her sister-in-law had kept it for years in the oaken chest of her family, and it had been used as a covering for the babies of many generations when they went to be christened, as well as for a pall when they were *angeli* (angels).

The mountaineers have a very pretty way of calling dead children angels. You never hear of a child being *morta*. They say, "Adele's or Gigia's angel is to be carried away to-day." If you ask after a lost infant, they will say, "*Ah buon anima*, good little soul, he was made an angel on such a day." When a child is baptised, they say it is "made a Christian," and that until it is baptised the witches have power over it. They can make no use of anything which has been signed with the cross.*

There are several superstitions rife respecting the time when a child is born. It is not good to be born when there is no moon, and a child who

* De Gubernatis, "Usi Natalizi." Note, p. 108.

sees the light on a Friday or the thirteenth day of the month is looked on as very unlucky.

An Italian child is certain to have two baths in his earthly sojourn, one when he enters life and another when he leaves it. The one is to wash off original sin, the other to cleanse away earthly impurities; beyond these the daily bath is not thought needful. There is a particular superstition as to the certain evils likely to ensue if a baby's head is washed, and a good crust of *lattime* is rather a good omen than otherwise. The daily toilet of an Italian baby would amuse, and perhaps shock, an English nurse. Its principal garments are a little bodice with sleeves, and a long straight, stiff band, made of corded material, five or six inches wide and two and a half yards long. This *fascia* is bound tight round and round the entire length of the baby, till it is a long straight bundle. In some parts the arms are bound down to the sides beneath the *fascia*, but in Tuscany they are generally left free. Some mothers put a little gown over the *fascia*, but many leave it in its natural or rather unnatural stiffness. In this convenient form babies may be entrusted to the tender mercies of other children without risk of their spines being broken by a fall. They are laid on the bed without fear of rolling off, and

may be carried like a bundle under the arm or on the head. I once saw a woman calmly plaiting straw with her infant stuck into the hole of an old gatepost near her. Rosa's baby sleeps in the large winnowing basket. It was the custom of the Romans to nurse infants in winnowing baskets to bring good luck. A beautiful antique bas-relief in terra-cotta exists, representing the infant Bacchus asleep in a basket of precisely the shape of Rosa's. The woman known at the Nook



ROSA'S BABY IN ITS USUAL CRADLE, THE WINNOWING BASKET.

as La Povera carries hers on her head in a basket. As no *external* discomfort ensues, the *fascia* being so thick, the poor infant is generally changed only twice a day!—morning and evening; and even then the use of water is very limited.

De Gubernatis tells us of a curious practice of Tuscan mothers, to give a child a decoction of house leek (*sempervivum tectorum*) the first Fri-

day after its birth, to ensure it a long life and ward off convulsions. *

The frequent smiles of a baby in its sleep are by the Italians called *benedetto*, and they say an angel is whispering to it.

It is also a belief that the child's soul is not



INFANT BACCHUS CRADLED IN A WINNOWING BASKET.
(*From an ancient gem.*)

firmly bound to its body till it is seven years old, † and that its good and evil genii fight within it till that time, which is a good way of accounting for the extraordinary mixture of imp and angel in most children.

* "Usi Natalizi, p. 131."
† "Ibid., p. 4."

CHAPTER XX.

EXCURSION TO MOUNTAIN VILLAGES.

July 20.—We are no longer exiles from the world; we can reach at least as much of it as we can see from our eyrie, for a kind friend has sent us up a pony-chaise from Florence. The pony itself is one of the aborigines of the Nook, an important member of Pietro's family. At least twice a day does Harry's brigand-like friend or his handsome son lead the sleek pony past the gate to drink at the waterfall. Morning and evening we espy our black-bearded Pietro lounging patiently by the roadside, or reclining on a green bank, while the pony crops the herbage near. If the pony is harnessed to the cart to carry wood, his master makes a bower of chestnut or fern branches around him to keep off the flies; and altogether the pony is a personage. We have secured the services of this pretty looking little creature to pull the newly acquired pony-chaise, and anticipate great pleasure.

An artistic friend, who has lately joined us, volunteers to drive, and great discussions arise as to the direction we shall take in our first excursion.

From our windows we can see five or six different villages. Popiglio is a straggling little town running in long rows of white houses up the opposite hill forming the front where two valleys meet. To the left of Popiglio winds the valley of the Lima, where mountain meets mountain, range behind range, till they reach the Baths of Lucca. Halfway down this wondrous vale of crags and points is a village with an old castle at the back, perched high up on a steep rock like an eagle's nest. Seen from here the houses appear to hang over the cliff as if they were cut out of cardboard and gummed on; it seems marvellous that they do not fall off.

This is Lucchio, and we are all most anxious to make our first excursion there; a certain local guide-book says that the ascent to Lucchio from the bridge across the Lima below it must be made on foot, and is steep beyond any idea (scosceso al di là d' ogni idea). Of course this, with the picturesque old castle, only inflamed our ardour. We have ordered the carriage for to-morrow morning, and the mother is busy packing a luncheon basket.

July 21.—A lovely but very hot day. The native pony looks even more than usually sleek, and we expect great things of him as we start down the winding road whose four or five zigzags of half a mile each bring us nearly to a level with the Lima.

But alas! appearances are deceitful; the pony has been used to drag cars of wood, and mistaking us for logs carries us at his usual pace. The artistic friend makes him at length understand that something more is expected of him, whereat pony expresses his willingness to oblige by lifting up his hinder quarters to a great effort, and then settling into a scramble, which looks lively but makes little way. At the first wood-pile on the side of the forest-bound road, he brings even this to an abrupt end, stopping short as if for us to load. As the crow flies it is not more than two miles to Lucchio, but for mortals to reach it takes a drive of eight miles and a climb of three.

Having descended the hill we follow the course of the Lima along its lovely rocky banks, where woodland and cornfields alternate with rocky terraces and ferny dells on the sides of the undulating mountains. Down in the vale are all kinds of industries, a brickmaker's yard, large iron-smelting

works, and the great paper mills where Sig. Cini converts into paper not only rags, but the bark of the chestnut trees of his wide woods. Then we cross the fine old bridge built by Ximenes in 1772, for Pietro Leopoldo, Duke of Tuscany. It is a very florid structure, and has rather a theatrical appearance with its pilasters, pinnacles, and fountains, its mixture of red brick, dark stone, and stucco.

Next we pass through Popiglio. This name is supposed to be of Roman origin from the *Gens Pompilia*, but there is no authentic history. In feudal times—when every castle commanding an eminence had an hereditary foeship to the fortresses commanding the adjacent hills, especially the ones next it—Popiglio had a constant feud with Piteglio, remains of which linger to this day. The Piteglio people speak with great disdain of "those Popiglese," as they call them, and never fraternize with them as with other villages.

The church is a very picturesque bit of architecture externally, though the interior is rather dilapidated. It boasts of a painting dated 1577, —a Resurrection by Bastiano Veronese, but it is much injured by time. In the outskirts of the village we saw the first grapes since leaving the plains. I believe wine is made here, but it is so

acid as to have become proverbial. The Popigliese seem desirous to become fashionable; in the centre of the town is a little piazza with an inn and a caffè. The latter is very bright, its arched glass doors are adorned with a profusion of paint and stucco, and above it are the words "Caffè Filarmonica ed altri generi," which is as if an English innkeeper wrote on his sign-board, "White Horse Inn and other eatables."

There is a story of unusual horror connected with Popiglio. Long, long ago, during the Carnival, some young men who were among the maskers got into a broil which resulted in the death of one of their number. His companions, masking the corpse and themselves, bound it to a chair and carried it to the father's house, where they set it in the midst, and having danced round it for a time, left the house.

The father turned to the visitor and said, "Why don't you go with your friends;" but receiving no answer and seeing no motion, he took off the mask and saw his own son—dead. This is one of Luigi's awful legends.

On a hill above Popiglio are two ruined towers, supposed to be mediæval, but strange to say there are no legends left of the time of their construction. Since the memory of the oldest inhabitants'

immediate ancestors they have been ruins. It is said that about one hundred years ago they were connected by a circular wall, which formed the two towers into a fortress; but now there is hardly a trace of masonry, and they stand isolated about sixty yards apart.

A little farther on we pass the bridge of Popiglio, a curious, narrow, highly-pointed structure, which has a story of a traitor and his head. In 1325, when Castruccio, who built this bridge, had become Lord of Lucca, his ambition was to be also Lord of Pistoja. A certain Pistojese, named Filippo Tedici, betrayed his native city into the hands of Castruccio on the consideration of 10,000 florins in gold, and the hand of Dialta, Castruccio's lovely daughter. Then the Pistojese rebelled against their usurper, and vowed the death of the traitor. He with his bride was safe in the fortifications of Popiglio Castle,—the two towers above the town,—when Martino Panciatica, of Pistoja, having the mountaineers on his side, who armed themselves with axes and sickles to join the fray, hunted out the traitors and chased them down the hill to the Lima. Here on the bridge (like Titus Manlius Torquatus and the Gaul) Panciatica and Tedici came to single combat. Tedici lost his head, which his triumphant adversary fixed forth-

with on his spear, and riding full gallop to Pistoja rushed into the piazza exclaiming, "Fellow citizens, behold the head of the traitor!"

The governors of the town had it fixed to an iron in front of the palace of the Anziani. When in course of nature it disappeared, they caused it to be replaced by a stone head, which we saw as we passed through Pistoja on our way a month ago.

Our long drive is over, we draw rein at a wayside inn, and looking up see Lucchio perched on its crags high above us across the river. But first there is something to see on this side, the cave of the Tana a Termini. It is so named because it is at the boundary of the states of Lucca and Tuscany. The Antiquary is interested to think that the place as well as the name appertained to ancient times. The boundaries of Etruria as well as of Rome were marked by images of the god Terminus, the guardian of the sacred rites of possessions.* The name seems to point out this as the ancient Termini, and legend confirms it by asserting that Lucchio was the site of the Lucus Feronia, the sacred wood of the Dea Feronia, which Micali says was always placed near the confines.

* Micali, "Popoli Antichi," ch. xxi. p. 81.

A young woman from the inn, acting as guide, leads us into a damp, dark cave, we holding candles in our hands, much to the detriment of our dresses.

The local guide-book quoted before gives a very flourishing description of this cave, which it describes as being glorious with stalactites and stalagmites of all forms.

We were under the impression that we should see a vast glittering cave, but it turns out to be one of the minor disappointments of life. Stalactites are here in abundance, as our crushed hats and bruised heads can testify; and stalagmites also, as we know from so frequently stumbling over them and cutting our boots, but we come to no fairy caves, or even vast caverns. Our progress is like that of a mole, blindly crawling along his low, damp, winding passages.

At length we stop the guide and ask when we shall reach the cavern. She holds up her quaint lamp and looks at us in amazement, telling us, "*This* is the cavern; you are in it now."

"Is there no large place,—is it all like this?"

"It is all like this," she repeats.

"Then I have seen enough," says Aunt Louisa, and she turns back forthwith.

"And I." "And I," and two more of us follow

her, leaving the guide to proceed with the only gentleman of the party whose masculine mind determines to "see the end of it."

In less than half an hour he rejoins us under the shadow of the trees by the Lima.

"Well, have you seen the end of it?" we ask.

"No; and I think you might be grateful to me for not doing so," he laughs. "I went on and on, now and then crawling through little holes, and sometimes climbing over a wall for a change, when at last we reached a black abyss, to the bottom of which our candles could not penetrate. 'You must drop yourself down here, signore,' says the girl. 'How far,' I ask. 'Oh, it is a good depth.' 'And then?' 'Then you go on very much like what you have seen; there are a few bad places.' 'And how long can we go on?' I inquire as a matter of curiosity. 'I don't know. I was once in here six hours with a gentleman ('Of course an Englishman!' ejaculated I), but we had not got to the end of it then.' So I gave up the point, and thought the six hours would be better employed in going up to Lucchio with you ladies."

"I think caves are a mistake, and the Tana the greatest. I hereby make a vow never to enter another," was Aunt Louisa's energetic verdict.

After a slight rest under the trees we feel em-

boldened to climb that wonderful cliff which faces us, crowned at a dizzy height by its groups of old houses. A little girl from the inn is desired by her father to carry our luncheon basket and sketching materials. We glance doubtfully at her, for the things are heavy, and she a little slight maiden of ten years old. But she slings the baskets and bags on her head in a pile, and trots off across the bridge quite merrily. We follow up the tortuous pathway climbing wearily over the rolling stones, with the unaccustomed feet of dwellers in the plain. A hot sun beats on our heads, and the way is long, very long, very rough, very narrow, and frightfully precipitous. The road is bound here and there by stone girders or bars across it, forming rude steps; in other places it climbs up the face of a cliff by means of little zigzags round wedge-shaped walls.

On we go, up, higher and higher; now a few houses appear at different turns in the path, houses placed without plan or regularity. Up, still up, and we pass under a dark gateway, which was once the chief gate of the town, when Lucchio was fortified. Here we pause and turn to look outward through an ancient window in the wall. What a view is seen! Down a great precipice at our feet is the Lima in its fertile valley; on a level with us are mountain tops and wooded slopes, one

behind another, like the waves of a sea enchanted into stillness, as they uplift in endless folds, ridges, and crests, they recede, till the last appear mere clouds.

We pass on and enter the town, winding about amidst the quaint, dark old houses. There is neither street nor plan, houses seem to spring up here and there just as they find standing room on the precipitous rock. Some have one or two more floors on one side than on the other, so steep is the ascent.

On the part which looks outward, precipices fall sheer down outside the tiny gardens. They say that mothers of young children living there tie the babies to the house doors with ropes, lest they toddle too near the edge. The church is gaudily ornamented in the interior, and has a good carved stone pulpit. The bells are curiously placed on frames resting on the ground in a street outside the church. We supposed that as the rock rises to the height of the tower just behind it, that it would not be safe to hang them in the tower on account of the reflected vibrations.

By the church is a very pleasant little refuge, suggestive of rest to our hot and weary souls. A stone seat in the true old Italian style, runs along the whole length of the church, while a few yards

in front rises a precipitous cliff, of many-coloured limestone, still further varied by lichens, mosses, and rock plants of every species. Between the two a long shady gallery is formed, and no sooner do we set eyes on it than we agree to rest and lunch here forthwith.

The mother opens the basket, but closes it again on Aunt Louisa's exclamation of "Oh! what a delicious old-fashioned balcony. I must have that at once while the light is on it."

Fatigue is forgotten, out come the three sketch-books, for different renderings of this view. The gallery between the church and cliff rises at one end up a steep ascent. On one side is the variegated rock, towering up some hundred feet high and crowned with acacias against the sky, and Virginia creepers trailing down from its summit; and on the other a row of little houses with arched doorways. They seem to be only of one storey; but I have no doubt that seen from the outside they are tall edifices of three or four floors. At the top of this original street, and placed right across it facing us, is a perfectly artistic old house, with a wooden balcony thrown out from the second floor, and an old door in a cavernous recess beneath it. A youth, who seems to have stepped off the stage, stands in the quaint balcony shaded by an old

white curtain. He has a tyrolese hat, a red sash round his waist, and an artistic air altogether.

Of course our appearance from the lower world creates an unusual excitement in this eagle's nest. The children leave playing on their doorsteps, the mothers leave heckling their flax, the youths forsake their idle talk, and we soon have a crowd around us and another watching from half-way up the street. Such remarks as these reach our ears from time to time:—

FIRST YOUTH.—"What are they doing, do you think?"

SECOND YOUTH.—"I think they are taking the picture of Maria's house."

THIRD YOUTH.—"Yes; come and look at this one," pointing out the artistic friend. "There's the house and the *loggia* and all."

At this moment Aunt Louisa espies a characteristic woman in red stays with blue rosettes on them, large white sleeves, a blue skirt looped up over a striped one, a yellow kerchief, and two towering bundles on her head. She stops to talk with the group up the hill, and Aunt Louisa begins to jot her down.

"Oh, she is moving!" she exclaims in agony.

The young men grasp the situation in a moment, and call out: "Stand still, Maria; the

ladies have put your house in their pictures, and want you with it."

Maria blushes and stands with her head-poised load, looking a picture ready-made. The costumes of the women are delightful; this little town, so inaccessible to the rest of the world, is also inaccessible, thank goodness, to modern innovations, and the people preserve the ancient Lucchese costume: the coloured embroidered stays and full white sleeves of the *camicia*, the looped-up skirt of one colour over another, and the kerchief that gives the bit of bright orange or red so becoming to these swarthy complexions.

The girls of Lucchio are very pretty, they have bright smiling faces, very different from the more serious Tuscan features; but, I grieve to say, also infinitely less cleanly. As soon as you pass the frontiers of Tuscany you perceive the difference: the roads are less beautifully kept, the people more slovenly, the faces of a different character.

We have not got out of the land of innate good manners, however; for no sooner do we open our luncheon basket than the whole twenty-one spectators in our immediate vicinity draw back and leave us quite alone to enjoy our meal. The bell-ringing youths retire to their belfry shed, and send a scout now and then to peep round the

corner and report progress. A boy is despatched for a flask of cold water from the fountain; a woman brings us out glasses and discreetly vanishes again.

Refreshed and rested we go in search of further adventure, and explore this extraordinary town more completely. It is a regular labyrinth. We wind on the slippery pebble pathway round about the queer old houses, with their little *ajas*, or threshing-floors, in front of them. The whole household seems to live on the *aja;* the women are all occupied in spinning or in heckling flax, which seems a great industry here. There are bundles of flax in every direction, and the paths are made still more slippery by the flax dressings and husks of straw all over them. The men are for the most part idling about, so we presume it is their hour of *siesta*.

Aunt Louisa suddenly makes a discovery: "Here's the sketch of the day," she cries, and we all hasten to see and admire. An ancient arch in the foreground, within it an old courtyard on the west, open—save a low wall—to the view of the valley far below. On one side is a great rugged cliff and the other facing the archway is occupied by a perfectly mediæval house. It has a balcony with stone pillars on the second floor, and a fine flight of

steps leading to it. Beneath this *loggia* is a double arched façade, forming the front of a cavernous wine shop, a great oaken-beamed room with barrels and shelves of flasks, etc., all round. The light slants in by an old-fashioned window on a group of picturesque bearded men playing *briscola* at an ancient oak table. It was a scene worthy of "Tito Conti"; just the setting for a carouse of Cavalier or Roundhead soldiers, such as he delights to paint.

Aunt Louisa and the friend set themselves down in front of the archway and the distant hills that make a background for it, and are soon surrounded by a crowd of admirers. The mother, who has already made friends with the mistress of the house, goes up at her invitation to see the interior, and finds a still prettier sketch looking outward from the door of the large oaken-roofed room. The woman, with the innate grace of her country, puts herself into the sketch by seating herself to nurse her baby on the doorstep just in a ray of light from the *loggia* without.

The mother's attention is divided between sketching and conversation. She is asked to decide whether the sick baby has *miliara* (miliary fever) or some other eruption, and then ensues a great deal of mothers' talk;

another woman comes up with her sick child, and is informed that the lady knows all about babies, so she has to prescribe for a second slight infantile disease. Hearing that we are from Florence, the woman exclaims, "Then you know our Count?" and is very much surprised at a negative answer. She shakes her head and adds, "Ah! we are all very anxious about our Count."

"Indeed, why?" asks the mother.

"We are afraid he is dead. The son of Giovanni lo zoppo (lame John) read something in a newspaper at Popiglio about a count who had been murdered in Florence; and we are dreadfully afraid it is our Count. If it is, what should we all do?"

The mother reassured her by saying there were so very many counts in Florence, and the chances were that it was *not* their especial *padrone*. Out goes the woman to the balcony, and tells all her friends that the foreign lady does not think their Count is hurt, which they all believe implicitly, and smile rejoicingly.

The Antiquary makes little explorations on his own account, and hears that one woman had once possessed a crucifix which was sold for several scudi; another had sold all her old plates to a dealer from Florence. He hears rumours of an old spear

which was found in the ruined castle, and is shown a coin of Nero, which he was pleased to see, as proving the Roman origin of the place, even if it were not the *Lucus Feronius*. Another woman, seeing the interest this old bronze coin attracts, forthwith brings forth a bright silver one, which she says is the money of the blessed St. Peter, but is very much disappointed when the Antiquary with the words, "Only a Papal paul," puts it aside with barely a glance.

But we have to go still higher to the ruined fortress towering over our heads, a castle of about the same date as Popiglio. This ascent, although partly covered with thin grass, is worse than the former one, the steep little path is so terribly slippery. Here a young woman of the place becomes our guide, tripping up lightly and securely with her bare feet, and often saving some member of our party from slipping with her ready hand. As we toil painfully upwards we hear a stentorian voice from the old walls above us calling, "The key! bring the key!" This raises a hope in our minds of being taken to visit some mysterious chamber or vault, the secret treasures of which are probably well secured by a ponderous mediæval lock. A ragged boy who has followed our steps having flatly refused to go in search of the

required instrument, the matter drops. We are afterwards consoled by finding that the key called for is only that of a flourishing kitchen garden that surrounds the ruined towers over head, and belongs to the mother of the loud-voiced youth who had shouted from his perch a-top of the old castle walls.

At last we reach the platform where stands all that remains of the fortress, consisting of the before-mentioned towers and the shell of the castle courtyard. Within this enclosure we find several irregular apertures, through which we look on the prospect beneath and around us. Although not very extensive, being bounded by the stupendous mountains and crags which rise on every side, it can hardly be surpassed in its savage and awful grandeur. The castle courtyard is planted with corn, now in stubble, and belongs to the owner of the kitchen garden. We are also shown the ruins of an old cistern or well which formerly supplied the castle with water. It is now choked up with earth and weeds. It being time for us to descend, we carefully scramble down the slippery path, giving a last glance to the grim old fortress, and thinking how easy it would have been in the old feudal times for its master, if out of temper with his vassals, to crush them and their

dwellings by sending down some huge rock from the castle walls.

The old fortress has had its vicissitudes, having been successively conquered by the different neighbouring powers: the Pistojese, the Florentines, and once by Castruccio, Lord of Lucca. Even as in more ancient days the Etruscans took it from its first possessors, the Umbrians.

In 1437 it was saved by the courage and *finesse* of two girls. They were orphans of Vico Pancellorum, whom the Castellano of Lucchio had taken under his protection, intending to marry one of them. These brave damsels having found out that he had engaged in a scheme to betray the castle into the hands of the Florentines, determined to rescue it from his designs. They cajoled him into a remote place near the precipice, and making believe to joke, they managed to bind him with strong ropes, and pushed him over the edge of the rock, where he hung suspended. Then these mediæval Delilahs called the people to arms; and the Florentines found themselves repulsed by a vigorous resistance where they expected to enter as masters. The Lucchese were so pleased with this exploit that they gave the girls a dowry for their heroism.

A little apart from the village is a pretty

villa surrounded by grounds, this is the summer habitation of "Our Count." The people who meet us ask if we are going to see their contessa. I suppose not many travellers ascend to Lucchio for other reasons. It is impossible to guess what has led them to choose this eagle's nest, unless it be a wish to soar above sublunary troubles. Assuredly the world will not annoy them much up here.

Beyond the count's villa a little path leads round the mountain's side to the ancient fountain. It is now nearly evening, and the path is filled with a continuous stream of women and girls going to and from the fountain with their great copper vessels on their heads.

One of them seeing the mother,—who is resting on a low wall,—look wistfully at the water, asks if she will have some, and gracefully falls on one knee so as to bring the *mezzina* low enough for her to dip out a glassful with her little sketching glass, rises and goes on with a smiling "Good evening, signora," without having spilled a drop. It is marvellous to see the ease with which they balance these large water vessels on their heads as they walk along the narrow stony paths, uphill and down. They turn their heads to talk to friends in the most easy way, and the vessel spins round, but

never overbalances. Some carry on their heads square flat baskets with a pile of linen which they have washed at the fountain. Altogether it is a very picturesque scene, and like almost everything else here, makes one think of the old Scripture stories of women going at eventide to the well. "Without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water" (Gen. xxiv. 11). The fountain itself is an old arched recess in the side of the mountain, and was built in the time of the Republic of Lucca, the word *Libertas*—the motto of the arms of Lucca—being still legible on it. A washing tank is close by, and here was a group of gaily bodiced women washing their sheets, etc.

Suddenly one of us turned round and exclaimed aloud, "Oh! what a wonderful scene." It really is marvellous. We are across a ravine, looking back to Lucchio on the opposite hill. A strange jumble of houses, tall and narrow, like towers, clinging to the very face of the precipitous cliff, which forms not only their foundations, but their very walls at the back, for one if not two or three storeys. There they are, piled up in the strangest confusion of tiny stone-bound windows, quaint little wooden balconies, and parti-coloured roofs; and right in the midst a tremendous mass

of uplifted stratified rocks, dazzling white in the sunlight, shoot up straight towards the sky. So grand, so high, so straight on end, that the effect is perfectly astonishing; but so thin, aerial, and fragile-looking, with the sharp needle-points and precipitous sides, that one feels it would not be surprising were a strong wind to blow down the whole rock, town, and towers. It is more than ever a matter of wonder to us how Lucchio ever came to be built, and when built how people could ever choose to live on that eyrie crag. The artistic friend, without wasting words, forthwith begins a sketch, but the Antiquary and the mother damp her ardour by the prosaic suggestion that it is nearly sunset and time to start homeward.

"It is an irony of fate," sighed the artistic one, "that allowed us to waste two hours on an old building, and only showed us this glorious view at the last moment."

On our homeward drive we stop to see Lizzano, a little village on the Lima, some miles from Lucchio. There is not much to see now, but the interest lies in what is no more. Once on a time, there was an old church, built before 1000 A.D., as well as a pilgrim hospital, a convent of nuns, and sixty-six houses and gardens. But Lizzano was a fertile deception. Below its flowery gardens was

a mass of sandy soil, schist, and soft earth, through which the waters of the torrent penetrated little by little. The inhabitants often heard certain rumblings and hissings under ground, but in their credulity thought they were only the malign spirits of Lago Scaffaiolo at work. At last, in January, 1814, the houses began to move, and the people ran out of them in great terror, not knowing where to fly. Little by little the town moved, till the whole mass, church, convent, and all, two miles in circumference, slid down and settled in the bed of the Lima. The nuns were received at Pistoja, and the people fled to other villages.

But now followed the still more terrible consequences: the river bed being filled up, a great lake was formed of the waters which could no longer reach the sea by their natural channel, and thus all the villages lying higher up the river were in danger of being flooded. The people of *Podilago*, seeing the waters rise around them, took their worldly goods and fled up the hill to Lizzano, not yet knowing of the disaster there. When they found the place was no more, and even the mountain had moved, great was their terror. In the course of time the waters found a vent, and the lake again became a river, as it is to this day.

A river which in summer is a mere thread of water rippling sluggishly in the midst of the wide channel of white stones, rocks, and smooth pebbles, and seems a very harmless, meek little stream indeed. So much so that one wonders what all these massive arched bridges are built for. But in the winter storms and the spring floods, when every little mountain cascade pours in its streams of melted snow, the Lima becomes a roaring lion, shaking its hoary mane against the boulders, rushing with full force against the quivering bridges, and roaring with a voice of thunder through its valley at the feet of the mountains which feed it.

A long moonlight climb up the three miles of zigzag at the pony's slowest pace brought us benighted wanderers to the friendly shelter of home.

CHAPTER XXI.

SAN MARCELLO.

July 22.—We have at last put into execution a long-talked-of project of rising with the sun and walking to San Marcello through the chestnut forests. The good Giorgio, Lachesis' second son, has undertaken to go to market in that important mountain town, and brings us our comestibles daily. Every morning at five or six o'clock he starts, and returns a walking heap of baskets about nine, when he settles to his field work for the day; for though his strong-minded mother has no objection to his earning a little on his own account, he is not expected to diminish his work on her behalf.

Giorgio has promised to be our guide through the three miles of forest maze that intervene between here and San Marcello. There is a good driving road, but that takes a detour of six miles down the one mountain and up the other.

We rise at the first streak of dawn, breakfast

in the solitary stillness of a house full of sleepers, and find Giorgio with all his empty baskets slung on his shoulders awaiting us in the *cortile*. Across the dewy lawn, over the rocky brooklet, and we are under the chestnuts. The early morning sunbeams slant beneath the trees and light up the glistening moss and ferns,—the little rosy woodland pinks and orchids, the blue campanulas and brown broom-rape, shooting up its sturdy russet stalks from the slight branches of the feathery broom. Here and there, where the white *dodder* with its little pink balls has woven a network over a bush of heather, the sun and the dew combine to make it look like a silver web. The little footpath meanders along the side of the rocky mountain, now a mere foothold, then opening out into a little grassy glade, where rocky boulders stand out massive from the soft herbage, and where the trees make a delicious chequered shadow among the flowerets. Everywhere looking down the cloister of gnarled tree trunks, one can see the valley of the Lima, its yellow cornfields busy with harvest, its serpentine river-bed, spanned with quaint bridges, and a general background of rich purple blue distance, which brings out the warm tree trunks into the greatest relief.

There is a great difference between a chestnut

forest and other woods,—a pine wood for instance. It seems to me just the difference there is between the English character and the Italian.

In a pine wood duty and emulation rule the growth of the trees. They all take the sternest and most unswerving line of duty, and every one runs itself up self-assertingly to a level with its neighbours. Look at a pine wood from outside, and it is a most lovely mass of verdure with golden lights and emerald shades. Glance upwards as you walk beneath it, and you feel in a holy temple of nature, and are awestruck at the beauty of rectitude; but look down at your feet, and a melancholy conviction comes over you that you tread on the dead leaves and spines which have been sacrificed in the upward struggle of the great trees, and that these in their death have crushed the flower-life from the ground, for in a true pine wood there is little verdure. And this seems to me a deep symbol of English life.

Now, in an Apennine chestnut forest you read the life of the Italian people, and see the type of their country. All is verdant, luxuriant, sunny, and fruitful, not because of the labour of cultivation, but in the gracious fulness of life in the land. Here are no pillared cloisters to give serious thought. The trees recline, or stand

upright, or intertwine as they will; they put forth long waving branches, with rich garlands of foliage like festal festoonings; the old gnarled trunks have coronals of wide leaves around them beneath the branches, and look like the spirits of classic feasters crowned for the banquet. The sun shines in through all the rejoicing verdure on ground which is neither sombre nor barren. Fern and feathery grass, purple heather and golden broom, each in its season carpets the ground beneath the ancient trees; mosses and lichens adorn the rocks that shoot up in their strength from beneath; flowers and ivy wreaths clothe the precipices to their very edges,—but the precipices *are* there. This much on a sunny day. But in a mountain storm,—then the woods are awful: the lightning strikes the finest trees, the floods wash down the stones and the little pathways, the wind whirls you over the precipices, and all that you thought so harmless and lovely becomes fierce and terrible.

Thinking and dreaming thus as we tread the little stony paths between the flowers and the abysses, we wind on our shaded way round the folds of the mountain of the "Lari," which divides the Nook from San Marcello. This is another of the names which interests the Antiquary, as

being of classic origin; he thinks the name is of the Lares, or "Shades of the dead," worshipped by the Romans and Etruscans. We follow the folds of this wooded height round and round little valleys, always descending, here and there coming on traces of the paving stones of the old mule track which passes the Villa.

At last, down deep in the valley, we cross a rushing little mountain torrent by a most picturesque half-ruined bridge. The cliffs rise up to giant height behind it, and the water pours down them over huge boulders, while in front the stream runs off by mossy glades under the shadow of the chestnuts; and where the trees divide the quaint village of Mamiano crowns a green knoll with its brown tower and *loggia*, and makes a most lovely picture. Aunt Louisa and the artistic friend would fain remain and sketch at once, but the serious Giorgio, suggesting that it is already late, and the signora will expect him to be home with the supplies, we succumb to his superior wisdom and walk on.

We skirt no more precipices now, the path leads us through open glades and shady level bits of forest till we reach the wide bed of the Liesina, and, minus a bridge, cross from rock to rock, and land on the opposite bank on a bed of flowers.

Masses of wax-like pink soapwort, spires of blue campanula and purple salvia, clusters of golden sun cistus, and all kinds of blossoms cover the ground. Then we reach an ancient mill, and remembering that the Antiquary has an interest in comparing the shape of quern stones with those of the ancients, we enter, invited by a smiling, black-eyed dame. There are three mill-stones in a row, slowly turning by water power; they are of a flattish form, only slightly raised in the middle, not cone-shaped like the Roman ones. But the surprising thing in this primitive mill is the presence of a grand Cardinal Bishop on the wall, calmly looking down on the revolving mill-stones through a veil of flour dust! And the cardinal bishop is not a common painting, but a perfectly Titianesque portrait, rich and mellow in tone in spite of a large hole and the effect of two or three centuries' decay.

How did such a painting, in its fine old carved ebony frame, come into the possession of the miller? The black-eyed wife did not know; it had always been there in her time, and she had no idea from whence it originally came. One is always coming on these surprises in Italy, and finding precious treasures where one would least expect it.

A path across a few flowery cornfields and up a steep little ascent brings us to San Marcello. The first thing we espy is a corner-stone built into a shabby old house, but the stone is a winged lion of a Ninevite aspect, and the shabby old house has a carved wooden balcony. Next we pass under a picturesque old archway, and emerge on the piazza of the town, with its modern little caffès, whose marble-topped tables stand under the shade of oleander trees in gigantic green tubs.

On one side of the piazza is a square *loggia*, used as a country bazaar. Two pompous inscriptions on the arches announce that the *loggia* was built by Pietro Leopoldo I., in commemoration of the opening of the splendid road he had constructed from Pescia to Modena, that which passes the Villa.

It has become the fashion for the aristocratic Florentines to *villeggiare* at San Marcello, and during the summer months the old-fashioned country town is overflowing with "toilettes" and equipages. There is nothing town-like about the place, it has more the aspect of a large village. The post office is a large building with the arms of Pope Leo X. (one of the Medici) in a sculptured medallion on its façade. A picturesque

fountain is just in front of this building, and it is crowded with living sketches all day, as maiden after maiden fills her *mezzina* and carries it away on her head.

It is well-known that the heights of the Tuscan Apennines were the first inhabited parts of Italy; and here, besides the remains of primitive manners in the customs of the people, we have in the names of places remnants of Roman times. San Marcello is said to have been the Roman *prædium Marcelli*, and in later times the inhabitants chose San Marcello as patron to their church, from a wish to keep up the old name. The church itself is of ancient construction, the tower and outer walls being of the style of masonry peculiar to the 11th or 12th centuries. The Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo I. restored the interior, with only one altar, according to the views of the Reformer Padre Ricci, in 1788. The frescoes were painted by Gricci, a minor Florentine artist. The church has now two or three other altars, built "in memoriam" by members of the "Cini" family, a family which has been important on these mountains for some centuries. A certain "Cini of Pistoja" was famous in the mediæval wars. "Captain Domenico Cini" was a well-known archæological

writer in 1772; while the members of the present family are at the head of the chief industries and charities of the country.

When the devotees of fashion who come yearly to rusticate at San Marcello take their evening promenade, a shady road called the *Selvermino*, serves them instead of their accustomed "Cascine" at Florence.

This promenade once boasted of a very large chestnut tree 9⅓ metres (30 feet) in circumference. Lastri, in his "Corso d'Agraria," vol. v., p. 215, says that in 1740 this tree, which was quite hollow, served as a wine shop, and that "mine host" paid 1 lire 82 centesimi a year as rent to Captain Domenico Cini. There are several very pretty villas with gardens about San Marcello, and it is a good centre for mountaineering excursions.

CHAPTER XXII.

GAVINANA.

July 30.—One of our early excursions with the native pony is to Gavinana, the famous field of battle in the war against the Pope Clement VII. and Charles V. of Germany, 1530, and the place where the Florentine hero, Ferruccio, was killed.

We are four companions, and the drive being long and hilly, we form a humane plan to walk in turns where the road is bad, a design which results in more walking than driving. Sometimes we all jump out simultaneously, each one refusing to ride while another walks, and the amiable pony plods serenely on, nodding his head and declining to be interested in our amicable disputes. We mount slowly the sunny hill which Mamiamo crowns so prettily, and the Antiquary discusses the probability of its having derived its name from the Roman family "Memmius," as well as Popiglio from "Popillia." Then we wake up the pony to gambol a little faster through

the level streets of San Marcello; but it is the hour of the fashionable *siesta*, and no one is awake to see his laudable efforts.

Pietro, the pony's owner, has told us that Gavinana is only two miles beyond San Marcello; but we have traversed nearly that distance before we commence the long and precipitous ascent, on a narrow road well supplied with rolling stones.

We go up, up, up, expecting to see Gavinana at every turn, but it keeps persistently out of view till we feel disheartened at the possibility of never seeing it at all. However, a sudden turn brings us into a deep ravine, full of rocks jutting out of red sandstone cliffs, with wooded slopes rising up above them. Our road winds round between the precipice and the forests, and Gavinana rises just opposite us, perched high on its verdant hill, like all Tuscan towns. We pass a shrine and a washing fountain, and as usual the latter has more votaries than the former. Crossing a fine high bridge over the rocky bed of the torrent, a few moments bring us to the quaint old houses of Gavinana. Espying a kind of stable, we find a shelter for the pony and promise of a feed for him; a man volunteers to unharness him, and in all faith we trust his self-

asserted ability, leaving carriage and pony to his mercy, and proceed to see the piazza.

A local proverb says, "When you have beheld a church, a fountain, and a battlefield, you have seen Gavinana." Consequently our expectations were not high, but having seen a most picturesque woodcut of the piazza of Gavinana, we had brought our sketchbooks to take that especial view; but though the fountain and the church are there, it is impossible to get them both into one focus. The artist of the woodcut must have sketched his church from one point, and then turned himself round and put the fountain into his foreground.

The church is a very picturesque old building, with the true Italian *loggia* on its façade and a beautiful old tower crowned by a cupola. It is built of the huge square stones which mark the early Tuscan architecture; the stones are now all hollowed out and worn with the rains of many ages. The interior possesses two splendid basreliefs in glazed earthenware by "Luca della Robbia," of which there exists a very pretty legend of kindness and gratitude. It happened that the great master, "Della Robbia," was ill, and was taken to Gavinana for change of air. The villagers received him with such kindness

and nursed him with so much care that he completely recovered. When he left, he offered some remuneration to the people with whom he had lodged; but they refused it, saying it was enough to have helped to restore a life so valuable, but adding that if he felt under any obligation, a gift of even the smallest of his works would more than repay it. Luca della Robbia, touched at this tribute to his fame, promised that he would dedicate to Gavinana not merely his least work, but the best he could execute; and in due time the proud village received the two masterpieces which now adorn the chancel. They are a Nativity and a Crucifixion; the figures are very expressive and graceful, the grouping harmonious. There is a beautiful *pila* for holy water, of cinque-cento work, and a fine organ, large enough for a cathedral, the gift of a patriotic Domenico Acchilli, who has also founded good schools here.

Just opposite the west front of the church is a house superior to the surrounding habitations. It is the Casa Palmerini, on the doorstep of which the already wounded Ferruccio was killed by Maramaldo. A charming family party occupies the historical doorstep as we gaze,—a stylish party of pretty girls and their esquires, sitting *al fresco* before their house. A man coming

forth from the crowd of idlers round the fountain volunteers to show us all the historical places, and takes us through quaint streets, where the houses have curious flights of steps, platforms before their doors, and old-fashioned wooden balconies in odd corners, to the "Port' arsa," or rather the place where the gate once stood. A little beyond is the field of battle, now a calm, smiling cornfield, and a chapel is built on the spot where Ferruccio was wounded. Then he took us to see another old gate, "Porta Fiorentina," which is now an archway under a house, the old walls having quite disappeared. All these things interested the Antiquary, who recalled the whole scene and told us how the heroes fell there in ancient days.

It was when the Emperor Charles V. and Pope Clement VII. would bring back the Medici into Florence, in 1529, and had got together an army of mercenaries to besiege the city. The Florentines, in their distress, sent to call their favourite Francesco Ferrucci, called the "Gideon of the Republic," to their aid.

He was at Volterra, where he commanded the republican troops, and had just raised the siege of that town by the Marchese del Guasto and Fabrizio Maramaldo.

Leaving Volterra, he marched with his army towards Pisa, to go to the help of the Florentines; but Maramaldo, still sore from his defeat, contrived to harass his march and barricade his passage over the Pescia at Ponte Squarciaboccone. Ferruccio turned southwards, and, passing the valley of Ariana, fell in with the troops of his colleague, Bernardo Strozzi.

After two days' march they reached the Monte delle Lari (our hill), crossed it, and arrived at San Marcello, where they found their enemies, the Medicean troops, under Panciatichi, and they passed on to Gavinana. The Prince of Orange having been advised of Ferruccio's movements, marched out of Florence with eight thousand men to meet him. The armies met in the field we had seen, just outside the Pistojese gate; here a fierce fight ensued. In the fray, Ferruccio and the Prince of Orange met hand to hand, and the latter was killed in the battle. His partizans dragged his body into the chapel close by to hide the catastrophe, and Ferruccio's men cried "victory;" but victory was not for them. Maramaldo had not yet had his revenge, and he led on his army, at this point attacking the Republicans in the flank. They made a breach into the town, and a horrible massacre ensued. Fer-

ruccio tried to reanimate his troops, but fell covered with wounds.

Then the Medicean general, Orsini, asked him, "Will you surrender?" "No!" answered Ferruccio, with a tremendous cry, and rose up bleeding to continue the hopeless fray. A Spaniard took him prisoner, but his old foe, Maramaldo, claiming him as his captive in right of revenge, dragged him away, and on the doorstep of the house opposite the church plunged his sword into Ferruccio's throat. The dying hero exclaimed, "Oh, vile Maramaldo, to kill a dead man!" and then, reaching an imperial standard, which he had taken in the battle, wrapped it round his limbs and died. And so the tyrant's flag served as shroud to the last hero of the Republic! The field where the battle took place is called the "Campo di Ferro" (field of iron) to this day, and many are the ancient weapons turned up from time to time by the ploughshare.

After the Antiquary's story, we look with double interest at the old stone, dated 1530, which bears Ferruccio's name. This is on the right side of the church, where they say that once, in making some reparations, a skeleton was found, which now reposes under the high altar. A grand new Latin inscription was placed under the portico in 1843, but we like the simple old one best:

Qui
COMBATTENDO PER LA PATRIA MORÌ,
FRANCESCO FERRUCCI,
A Di 3 Agosto, 1530.

The guide tells us that several pieces of old armour found here are preserved in the house.

Demanding permission from the stylish *villeggianti*, we are shown into a dining-room, where a woman shows us three rusty halberds, one of which is handsomely worked. Having seen these, she, with great state, brings forth a visitors' book, in which we are requested to write our names. The Antiquary thinks the museum is not worth the trouble. Aunt Louisa proposes to write :

" Old halberds three
Were shown to me,
Naught else I see.
Signed Louie T——."

But time is passing. In half an hour we must start ; and to carry back three sketch-books without a memorial of the place would be too absurd after having brought them so far.

Two of the party forthwith settle down to draw the church ; and the elegant *villeggianti* politely supply the artists with chairs and themselves with unwonted amusement for a time.

"The mother" trots off down the village and

across the bridge, the Antiquary following her, to catch a sunset view of Gavinana from the other side of the ravine. Here she is still when the other two friends take their homeward way down the rugged road, leaving the Antiquary to follow with her in the carriage. It is already sunset, and a two hours' drive is in prospect, so the mother reluctantly packs up her paints and joins her spouse in the chaise. But why goes the amiable pony so uneasily? Why does he slide farther into the shafts till they drop towards the ground like ploughshares, and the carriage is nearly on his back? Why, indeed! The man who volunteered to take the harness off was not equal to the task of putting it on again, and the Antiquary descending finds his steed entirely loose between the shafts. The task of re-harnessing him is a difficult one, even to those who understand the intricacies of harness, for he is so very small that the straps intended for a larger horse have to be shortened and wound about into cunning little loops and knots to make them fit him. A kindly *contadino* appears on the scene, and the placid pony's toilet is soon satisfactorily made. The party proceed as rapidly as circumstances permit, arriving at home by brilliant moonlight about two hours later.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WITCHCRAFT.

August 1.—Harry's "friend and brother," the bearded Pietro, is ill, and great consternation reigns in the cottage which he rules. Not all the united feminine entreaties of the family—mother, wife, and three pretty daughters—can induce him to call in a doctor. Meanwhile, the fever and headache grow worse daily, till he is quite prostrate on his bed, and his family stand wringing their hands. At length they call "the signora" into council, and she goes to see the sick man, and gets an insight into nineteenth century witchcraft! She gently urges the necessity of calling in a doctor. Pietro replies: "I never see that doctors do any good. He'll come and tell me to take a pill or two, and go away with his five francs, leaving me just where I was before. No, no; if I am worse again to-day, I'll just send for the old woman: she did me a sight of good yesterday."

SIGNORA.—"Old woman?"

PIETRO.—"Yes; an old woman of Piteglio. It seems ridiculous to talk of, but the way that glass she put on my head drew out all the fever and pain was wonderful!"

Pietro's second daughter, Estere with the almond eyes, who stood with her hands clasped round the post of his bed, reiterated like an echo, "Yes, it does seem wonderful!"

SIGNORA (all eagerness).—"A glass on your head? Oh, do tell me all about it."

PIETRO (speaking in calm and serious earnestness).—"*How* she did it, I can't tell. *What* she did was just this: she took a tumbler of water, and, covering it with a handkerchief, turned it upside down on the top of my head as I sat upright."

SIGNORA.—"And did you not get wet?"

PIETRO.—"*Niente affatto* (nothing of the kind). There it stayed for two hours, without any one holding it, and it drew up all my fever and headache till the water boiled and bubbled with the *male* (suffering) that was going into it; and it is a fact, it took all the illness out of me. As a proof, see how much better I am to-day."

SIGNORA (trying to account for it on matter-of-fact principles).—"Ah, the water kept the handkerchief cool, and so it relieved the brain. Why not try it again to-day by yourselves?"

PIETRO (his feverish eyes becoming quite solemn). —"It would do no manner of good for us to try; it is not the water. She says some words; *'tis the words that do it.* Why, how else would the glass stay fixed upside down and the water not run out?"

SIGNORA.—"I can scarcely believe it."

PIETRO.—"*Eppure è vero* (nevertheless 'tis true)."

ESTERE.—"Yes, it is true; we saw it ourselves."

PIETRO.—"There was a young man at Piteglio who was very bad, awfully bad, once. Well, the old woman put a glass on *his* head, and nobody could pull it off. It won't come off, you know, till it has drawn out all the illness. He went to work with it for two days. At the end of that time it got so full of bad humours that it went off with a crash, and the pieces flew to the walls on each side of him; but he was perfectly cured."

Having gravely made them promise that if the old woman should be called again they would allow her to be present at the operation, or more properly incantation, the house-mother took her leave. Not trusting too much, however, to such a method of cure, she found means to secure the attendance of a medical man.

August 4.—"If it pleases you, signora, Pietro's wife is here. She says if you like to see her husband with the glass of water on his head, the 'wise woman' has just placed it," says our little housemaid entering the *salone*. We do not need a second summons, but seize our hats and rush out to behold a bit of veritable 19th century witchcraft. Pietro's house is swept and garnished, and the women in festal dress, it being one of the many *mezze-feste* kept in the country. It is, moreover, the name-saint's day of the handsome son of the house, Domenico. The family have but just returned from mass, bringing the woman from Piteglio with them.

There sits our brigand-like friend in Arab guise, with a sheet over his shoulders and a white cloth folded on his head, and on the head-cloth there balances an inverted tumbler more than half full of water. Chairs being placed for us, we take our seats in the group of his wife and daughters and the "wise woman" from Piteglio. A most harmless little "wise woman" she looks, with her neat homespun dress and kerchief, her round smiling face; there is a certain degree of knowing twinkle in her little black eyes, however. We keep our gaze fixed on the glass, expecting to see the water diminish and the head-cloth

become dripping; but no such thing occurs. Pietro sits calmly talking, moving his head here and there, the glass steadily balancing on the top, and the water in it not diminishing one jot.

Is it witchcraft or is it natural science? We ask the woman to try it on us. She laughs and says, "Volontieri, signora; but if you have no headache and fever it will not stay, and you will get wet." Having a decided leaning to this opinion ourselves we do not press the matter, and Pietro explains that he had a fearful pain across his brow half an hour ago, but when the water was put on he felt it being drawn up into the glass out of his head.

Of course we express our pleasure and wonder at such a novel method of cure.

"Ah!" says the woman, "if the doctors knew of this, they would give their ears to obtain the secret."

"There *is* a secret then?" asks Aunt Louisa; and the woman drops her eyes meaningly.

"I intend to try it when I get home," smiles the mother.

The cottagers all laugh, and the witch looks especially amused. "It won't stay for *you*, signora," they say; and Pietro adds, "You don't know the words she enchants it with, it is the

words that do it. 'Tisn't in reason that a glass should stay upside down and the water not run out, unless it was *fatata* (bewitched)."

"I think the *vacuum* is the cause," reiterates Aunt Louisa.

Pietro shakes his head as far as he dares move it, repeating his formula in a loud whisper: "No, signora; it is the *words*."

The wise woman's eyes twinkle mysteriously, as she adds, "He is right, there *is* a secret. My mother taught it to me before she died, and also to my sister who went to foreign parts, right away to Naples." (Every place out of Tuscany is a foreign land to a Tuscan peasant, be it known.) Then she adds: "It must be a glass of fresh water from a spring, and no one is to be allowed to drink of it first. The cloth also must be clean from the wash," explains the wise woman; "more than that I cannot tell you," and her narrow lips shut up close as those of a sphinx.

At this moment some one exclaims, "See, it is beginning to boil!" and truly little bubbles rose to the inner surface of the water.

"The air is entering from beneath," whispers Aunt Louisa; "the enchantment will soon be over, the water must run out now."

The wise woman has evidently the same idea,

for she said, "You have not as much pain as last time, Pietro; it is going to fall off now; take it before it wets you."

Pietro stooped, removed the tumbler, and shaking the drops from his whiskers declares himself perfectly cured.

We take our leave after a properly congratulatory speech, and hasten home to try if the witchcraft is to be explained on scientific principles. Aunt Louisa fills a glass of water at the spring, the mother brings a clean cloth, the servants stand by with incredulous looks and say, "It is useless to try unless the woman has told you her secret, signora." The house-mother covers the glass with the cloth, inverts it firmly on her hand, a little water escapes, just as much as the imprisoned air in the tumbler expands, and then no more.

The servants look on with wonder, almost indignant that their favourite belief in witchcraft should be shaken; but as the mother walks about with it on her hands they have their revenge in muttering, "Ah! but the signora could not cure the illness without the wise woman's secret!" We disdain their incredulity, though we feel almost sorry ourselves that the precious grain of witchcraft, which has survived till the 19th century, dies

a natural death by being proved to be natural science.

Aunt Louisa repeats her dogma: "The *vacuum* is the secret."

While the mother adds, "And the cold compress cures the headache."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE THRESHING-FLOOR.

August 6.—How quickly nature acts in this sunny country. The corn, which a few weeks ago seemed green and immature, is now not only "ripe unto the harvest," but already reaped. The fields gleam yellow and russet-brown in the foreground ridges, uplifted against the dark blue distant hills. The stream of life which passes that village artery, our piazza, has lately told of the reaping of corn. The women go out with their reaping hooks over their shoulders and a cord in their hands, and when the evening sun slants golden across the valley they return, half hidden beneath their burdens of rustling sheaves. The cord binds up the many bundles into a sheaf, the hook, which has reaped them, is thrust in among the stalks, while the bundles trot, as if alive, to their several *ajas*. All the valley of the Pieve seems moving, so full is it of these walking bundles. They jolt down the stony mule road, some with a ruddy

petticoat and pair of bare feet, some with manly legs and nailed shoes beneath them, they glide between the trees and slowly ascend the distant wood path to Piteglio.

David's psalm of rejoicing rises to my mind. I think that he must have taken his parable from some such scene as this! "He that goeth on his way weeping, and bearing forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy and bring his sheaves with him." Girls sing gaily as they bind up the reaped bundles, youths whistle merrily as they cut the yellow armsful, and everywhere is the echo of "lovely peace with plenty crowned."

All the ridges of corn land that stretch up the sides of the mountains have yellowed till they looked like golden steps, and now they are all reaped and garnered. At evening, when the corn is brought home, we see preparations for the next stage. The villagers go to the fountain with their largest cauldron or *paiuolo*, and returning pour the contents over their different *ajas*, which they sweep smooth, and render ready for threshing, having made a kind of primitive concrete by first smearing cow-dung over the ground. The effect is a hard, *clean*, smooth surface.

These threshing-floors, like everything else here, seem like pictures from the Bible. Who does

not remember Ornan and his four sons, who were threshing when David saw the angel of the pestilence stop over their homestead? This evening we saw the father of Annina, at the Pieve, threshing the priest's corn with his five sons, all standing close together, three on one side and three on the other; the great flails all flung in the air with the selfsame sixfold action, and brought down in complete unison. What a picture of patriarchal life it made!

In our own village the flail is heard in its rhythmic cadence nearly all day. A weak little measured stroke awakes us at dawn, and we see from our window the poor old bent Atropos, now convalescent, beating out a heap of beans.

The large *aja* of the Bettoni is a very busy scene; there are generally six or seven men either wielding the swinging flails or lying picturesquely on the straw in the shadow of the house.

August 8.—The brothers of the Pieve are still threshing the priest's corn, but this evening, instead of doing it the orthodox way, they were beating the sheaves against the wall of the apse of the old church, which projects on the *aja*. Aunt Louisa, highly amused at this, asked laughingly, "What harm the church had done that they should beat it so."

This gave rise to some rustic wit. One of the brothers smiled and said, "They did not mean any disrespect to the church;" and another added, "You know, signora, the sin is in the heart and not in the outward action. If we respect the church in our hearts, it is no harm to make it help us to thresh our corn," on which all the other brothers showed their white teeth in a family laugh, and Aunt Louisa walked on with a sensation of having received a Roland for an Oliver.

After the threshing comes the winnowing. This is done by the men flinging large shovelsful of corn across the *aja*. It is a great proof of strength, if a man can fling his corn well against the farther wall, where a large cloth is laid to receive it. The corn falls in a heap at the far end, and the husks, flying off by the way, scatter the intermediate ground. Luigi is famous in the parish for throwing the corn over his shoulder, and away it flies, falling in the selfsame spot at every throw. Women do a little of the winnowing in a large flat basket or wooden tray, which they hold in both hands, and toss up and down so that the husks fly off. In less busy times the winnowing basket serves as a cradle for the latest baby.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CONSCRIPTION.

August 9.—Threshing is still going on with great energy; the tiny piazzetta and side road are heaped with straw, and the children have gone wild with delight. They leap into the yellow abyss from the stony height of the wall, they bury each other and come to life again, they man· the lifeboats by getting into the round *ceste*, or baskets, and rock on the golden billows till they shipwreck themselves, when they shout again. Even baby, a round toddle of a year old, trots perilously along and enjoys a roll with the rest.

As I sit laughing at this exuberant fun a tall youth, with his coat flung over one shoulder and a white card stuck into his jaunty cap, comes whistling up the village, looking very merry. I recognise him as Pietro's handsome son.

Matilde espies him and runs out from her door, calling, "Oh, Menico!" Beppa comes rush-

ing down the side alley, stumbling over straw and children in her way to ask eagerly, "What number have you drawn?"

"One hundred and forty!" responds the youth with alacrity. "Only a hundred are to be taken this time."

"Brava, brava, mi rallegro!" (Well done, I am glad!) cries Beppa, shaking his hand eagerly, while Matilde asks, "Do you know what number my brother has drawn?" Domenico shakes his head. "I fear he has a low one, for I saw his mother crying," he answers.

Whereupon Matilde begins to weep too, ejaculating, "What will mother do? She will have nobody to do the heavy work for her when Carlo is gone, 'oi, oi!'"

Beppa explains to me that the conscription has been drawn at San Marcello that morning. All the youths of a certain age within a prescribed district are summoned; these youths all draw numbers, and as many of them as are required are taken, beginning at No. 1. These all have to pass an examination as to health, height, etc., and for as many as are rejected for infirmities, others are chosen from the numbers next in rotation; so it is only the very high ones who have a chance of escaping from the five years' service

unless their friends are rich enough to buy them off. By this time two or three more women have come out and are clustering round Domenico. His mother and sisters peer from their door at the end of the village with anxious faces. He sees them, and taking off his cap waves it in token of rejoicing. Pretty Estere flies up to join the group, while the solemn Luigi Bettoni hurries down to be the first to reassure his love Maria, and detains her so long, telling his glad tidings, that her old mother has arrived before her, embraced her son, and is sitting on the stone seat weeping quiet, happy tears.

"How has Caterina's boy come up?" asks one who I presume is the said Caterina's sister.

"Safe to be taken, and glad enough he is."

"Glad, eh? the young rascal; and what is his mother to do all the year? Go and *zappare* (use the pickaxe) herself, I suppose."

"Is Giulio Cesare (Julius Cæsar) taken?" asks Rosa, alluding to a scamp of a nephew who is his friends' despair, despite his classic name.

"No! eh!" laughs Domenico; "he comes out higher than I."

"Did you ever, now!" exclaims Rosa; "what a perverse thing is fate! All the good sons who work for their lone mothers are taken, and the scamps

that worry the very souls out of their bodies are left to worry them still. How about Gianni?"

"Oh, don't you know?—his bad eye got him off;" and Domenico laughs again.

Great excitement and curiosity prevails among the women. Domenico much pressed relates as follows:—

"You know he had a *fresco* (cold) in his right eye; well, he goes and puts salt in it, and makes it all bloodshot and swollen, then he buys a pair of blue spectacles. 'Ho!' says the examining doctor, says he, 'what is the matter with your eye?' 'Nothing more than usual, Signor Dottore,' says Gianni. 'It's been like that for years,' says he. 'Then,' says the doctor, 'you won't do for us, my man,' says he. Says Gianni, 'I can't say I'm sorry to hear it, Signor Dottore,' says he; and with that he walked off. But oh, what a laugh we had about it!"

It is a curious thing how uneducated language in all nations abounds in the use of the verb "to say." Domenico's relation seemed an exercise on the word "*dice, dice, dice*" (says he).

"Another man cut off his first finger on the right hand," adds Domenico, "not to be chosen. But I don't agree with maiming one's self for life just to save a year or two's service."

"No, nor I; but it really is vexing to have one's sons taken away when they are most useful, and for 'em to lose all good ways idling about in barracks till they are not fit for honest work," replies one of the women.

"Yet if some of us weren't soldiers, where would all the women be when the French and the Austrians come, eh?" and with this Domenico takes his still trembling mother by the arm and conducts her consolingly home, followed by his three admiring sisters.

Sounds of choral singing are heard in the distance, and presently a party of the Piteglio youths pass by on their way home; they all have the fateful white tickets in their hats.

One, who has evidently drawn a good number, is doing his best to reanimate his less fortunate confrères, by singing and inspiring them to shout with energy the favourite marching song of New Italy.

"Addio mia bella! addio!
L'armata se ne va;
Se non andassi anch' io
Sarebbe una viltà."

Many of them would willingly commit the *viltà* (cowardice) to remain in their own homes, however.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IDA'S FESTA.

August 12.—This is Ida's birthday; she has eight candles on her cake to-day, that is to say, she is eight years old.

Now Ida's birthdays have hitherto been celebrated with juvenile garden parties, she being the only "summer bird" of the family, and the children's minds have been greatly troubled as to how Ida's *festa* was to be kept in these mountain wilds. Not a friend or schoolfellow within twenty miles of us, even the dear cousins are half a day's journey distant; the five little faces looked very anxious. How dreadful it would be to have a birthday that wasn't a *festa* at all! Some of them have serious doubts whether such a birthday would "count."

Mamma comes to the rescue with a "happy thought." We will ask all the village children, and have a picnic.

"Oh, delightful!" cry a chorus of dancing, hand-clapping little things, and away fly Isa and Ida, hand-in-hand as usual, to give their invitations to the pretty children of the hamlet.

So it came to pass that yesterday we had a grand "oven morning," and a batch of cakes and pies was baked; then the mother and Aunt Louisa were closeted in the room of the latter for an hour or two, and all little people denied admittance. Harry declared he saw the cook carry in a large *pentola*, so they were certainly cooking. Isa and Ida, with feminine knowledge of the improbability of cooking without fire, scorned this idea, and said they heard a great rustling of paper. But at last, tired of mysteries, the children returned to play, till nurse called them to dress for the feast.

The company are asked for four o'clock, but at three the courtyard is full. There are Isolina the melancholy, and Isolina the gay; there is Assuntina, as motherlike as usual, with her stolid baby sister in her tired arms; there are the little boys in their Sunday trousers, which differ from their week-day ones by the patches being of a brighter colour, and the original material a little more visible in places.

At four o'clock we begin to load ourselves and

depart across the fields to a quiet little glade in the wood opposite the house. Some of us take laden baskets, one bears the white teapot, Harry walks off with a campstool. The pretty housemaid carries a kettle carefully held away from her light print gown. The plump cook, emulous of the grace of the *contadini* girls, balances a basket of crockery-ware on her head and gaily walks off with it; the mother, with her eyes anxiously fixed on this perilous load, following with an armful of shawls and wraps for the children when evening sets in.

Aunt Louisa has a mysterious *pentola*, tied down with paper like a jam pot, but nobody is allowed to be curious about this treasure which she guards so carefully.

The children run, dance, skip along merrily, the brown, barefoot little guests hand-in-hand with their entertainers in white frocks.

The glade is soon reached, a few sloping fields where chequered shades lie on the grass from the trees of the wood that skirts them, lichened rocks with ferns at their feet are scattered in picturesque confusion amid the trees. On the left rises a smooth grassy knoll, with rocks and a few young chestnut trees on it; and here we make our encampment. The children are dispersed to pick

up sticks in the wood, and come back, some dragging great branches, others with their little arms full of twigs.

Great excitement reigns while the fire is lighted, the whole party dance round it like infant fire worshippers, Harry, and Isa the gymnast, even taking flying leaps over it.

Meanwhile Aunt Louisa and Rosie, a young friend staying with us, have decorated one of the young trees with the eight candles which mark Ida's age, and "the mother" and others spread the cloth in true picnic fashion on the grass, where in a little time all the party gather round, some reclining like nymphs, some sitting like Turks or tailors, some squatting as only children or savage squaws can do.

The independent baby makes herself a soft nest in the mother's spreading skirts, and forthwith begins to munch bread and butter. The barefoot guests behave with great decorum, and while eating bread and jam with approval, glance doubtfully at the plum cake as at something unknown. It is neither like *necci* nor *polenta*, it is not bread or *frittata;* then what can it be? They are helped to it, but till Isa and Ida eat some before their eyes, cannot be induced to begin. At length laughing, black-eyed Isolina bites a morsel,—she

smiles and nods her head, takes a larger piece, and breaks into a joyous laugh.

"*Si, è buono,*" (Yes, it is good) she says, and all the others take heart and try too, except the solemn little Giacomo, who evidently looks on it as an insult to offer him any such outlandish food; and with his finger in his mouth, slowly rises and goes off to his mother, who with the other matrons is watching from behind the hedge.

Meanwhile Ida's candles make a diversion; they are not effective as an illumination, it being still broad daylight, but every now and then one of the pink paper shades catches fire, and a little flame leaps up among the green branches, and by these fairy fires we check off the number of Ida's years.

After tea Aunt Louisa brings out her mysterious *pentola*, and hangs it up on the branch of a tree. The whole party rush up to play the truly Tuscan game of *pentolaccia*. They are blindfolded one at a time, and have a stick put into their hand with which to break the *pentola* if they can. The independent baby begins, but does not do much damage, even though she wields the stick with two fat little hands. She rolls over with the force of the blow, and is picked up heels uppermost, smiling serenely and anxious to return to the

charge. The melancholy Isolina's turn comes next, but she puts her hands behind her and refuses to perform.

All take their turn, except those who are too shy; some miss and some hit, till it comes to Harry's turn. He, with his head full of "Jack the Giant Killer," wields the stick just as that redoubtable hero is known to do in fairy tale pictures, and in two blows crack goes the *pentola*, its pieces flying in all directions, and a heap of white paper parcels fall on the grass, and with a shout all the little friends plunge into the midst, making a fine circle of little legs around. Trim booted legs, brown bare feet, white socks and shoes, and hobnailed boots mingling together in the mêlée.

Every one comes up with a parcel, but Aunt Louisa, collecting them, redistributes the presents, for she has taken great trouble to name the toys for appropriate owners. Every little girl has a doll, every boy a whistle or a popgun, the babies are made happy with fleecy lambs or nodding donkeys, and the elder girls' budding vanity is gratified with fans or gay neck scarfs. The little girls turn by a natural instinct into nursing mothers, and retire to hug, kiss, and cuddle their dolls, while the boys indulge their natural instincts by making

a tremendous noise, Harry bringing a threefold boy-power to the work.

After about half an hour the ecstasies are sufficiently calmed for them to seek other amusements, and games are introduced. It is very curious to note the similitude of popular children's games in all Aryan peoples. Like the folk-lore and fairy stories, they seem fundamentally the same, but altered a little in detail to suit the manners of the nation. The first game all these little villagers played was the *ambasciatore*, which we may take as the Italian type of the old English game, "Here comes a duke a-riding." The tune is precisely the same in both countries.

On one side Isa, who had learned it, heads a large party of brides for the *ambasciàtore* to choose from. On the other, Assuntina alone comes dancing up and retreating as she sings,—

"Ecco l' ambasciatore ! Tra la li ra li ra le." (*bis.*)
(Behold the ambassador !)

Then Isa with all her train advances and retires as they sing,—

"Cosa volete ? Tra la li ra li ra le."
(What do you wish ?)

"Voglio un sposa. Tra," etc.
(I want a bride.)

answers the little ambassador. So each, dancing and singing in turn, a long dialogue ensues.

In the English version, the duke comes himself to seek his wife, and instead of asking what her fortune is, asks "What can she do?" on which the answer is,—

> "She can bake, and she can brew,
> And she can make a fine cake for you!"

All of which entirely expresses the Saxon straightforwardness and love of utility. These little Tuscan peasants, however, keeping up the ancient air of a far-off common origin, imbue the game with the Italian characteristics. Instead of the bridegroom, the ambassador comes to ask for her,—the *mezzano* of modern Italian life; then the first question is about her *dote*, how much she has for dower.

Next the mother asks what trade she would have to follow. This answer is variable, according to the fancy of the players. They name trade after trade, the mother answering to each,—

> "Non mi piace. Tra la," etc.
> (I do not like it.)

till at length he says,—

> "La faccio regina, Tra la," etc.
> (I'll make her Queen.)

at which all cry,

"Ecco la carozza a prenderla. Tra la," etc.
(Here comes the carriage to fetch her.)

and the ambassador carries off the chosen one, the song beginning again till all are taken.

When this is over exclamations arise of, "Now let us play the 'Bella Villanella' (the pretty country lass)." The children choose partners, and putting them opposite themselves form two lines, as in a country dance. The children all sing at once to a lively lilting tune,—

"La bella villana, bella villana,
Quando si lava, si lava così."

The pretty peasant,
When she washes, she washes like this—

(*Here they all wash their dresses in imaginary water.*)

"Si lava poco, poco,
Dopo un poco, riposa così."

She washes a little tiny while,
And after a little reposes, like this.

(*All stay with arms akimbo, in true idle Tuscan style.*)

Then with "Tra la la," they dance and turn their partners, leaving them on the opposite side.

In this way they go through an imitation of washing, combing, dressing, ironing, reaping, spinning, etc., etc., every work interspersed with the

characteristic "riposo." It is in fact the English "Mulberry bush," with the national differences. The Saxon works away with energy, even on "a cold and frosty morning." The Tuscan works a little and rests a little, and then has a lively festal dance. It is a pretty sight to see the rows of merry little faces, and the expressive lines of bare toes, all full of life and joyousness, as they dance over the green grass.

Next they all sit on the grass with the brown feet well in sight in a long row. The mother counts her eggs, *i.e.* the children's feet, and then says, "Now there are sixteen eggs; be sure you don't eat any while I go to Mass." In her absence the children tuck up a certain number of feet under their frocks, and exclaim, "What a long time mother is at Mass!" She comes home, counts the eggs, and says, "Why, how is this? I left sixteen, and now there are only ten?" The children answer that a woman came in her absence and offered them four fowls for the six eggs, and they took her offer.

"Where are the fowls?" asks the mother.

"Down in the field," they reply.

The mother goes to seek them, and no sooner is her back turned than all her children jump up and dance about shouting, "We've eaten

them ourselves!" whereupon the mother has to catch them all and whip them. The last one caught has to be mother next time. Is not this very like our old English game of "Giants"? I do not quite remember, but feel sure there was a game very similar somewhere in my youth.

By this time the dew is beginning to fall, for on these mountains we have dews almost worthy of England, and we merrily turn towards home just as the orange and red fade into greys in the sunset sky; and the "Prato Fiorito" and "Pellegrino" mountains become a black dome and a dark point instead of the glorious purple and rose beauties they have been for the last hour.

It has oozed out that we are going to have fireworks, and when we reach our lawn we find it invaded by what seems the whole male population of the neighbouring village of Piteglio, a crowd of men and boys in fustian.

The Antiquary secures the assistance of the Bettoni brothers to affix the catherine wheels to poles. Roman candles and squibs go off with great *éclat*, the rockets ascend with due speed, amid the shouts of the assembled crowd, and a changing Bengal light, making the scene alternately red, blue, and green, fills the minds of the Piteglio boys with admiring astonishment

The last light has gone out, darkness falls with double shades, and Ida's birthday is over.

"We thought we should not have any *festa*," says Isa, with a sigh of intense satisfaction; "and we have had a better *festa* than ever before."

"May I have my birthday here, too, mamma?" begs plump Lulu; "there is more room to play here than in Florence."

But when Lulu understands that at her birthday it is too cold to play out of doors, and that the mountains will be all covered with snow, she shrugs her little fat shoulders and goes back content to await her town birthday with five candles.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LOLI.

September 1.—We have been in Arcadia, and have enacted one of old Kit Marlowe's pastorals. Life has suddenly gone back a couple of centuries. Arcadia in this instance is Loli, an almost mediæval village which has all these months been nestling in the valley just beneath us, and we never found it till to-day. To reach Loli there are inexplicable, descending paths: now winding through the chestnut woods, then skirting the tiny meadows and cornland holdings of the villagers; here we cross the rocks in the bed of the torrent, there are scratched and hindered in a thicket of blackberries and mountain raspberries. A steep little bit of the old mule-road, which has here become a deep ditch bordered by a line of boulders, brings us into Loli.

Four or five ancient houses (with that solid, even castellated appearance that buildings assume

in Italy) cluster round an irregular piazzetta, through which a stream ripples under a bridge in the midst, and forms a large tank on one side. If one wanted a scene for the trial of a witch by the water ordeal, this green, melancholy tank, with its mossy stone boundaries, would be the very place to sketch. The houses are of solid stone, grey with age and green with lichens. Stone staircases lead to the upper floors outside the houses, and grim old gargoyles in the form of writhing serpents pour out the water from the roofs of flat stones. Over one or two doors are carved stones with the arms of some ancient proprietor, and the dates 1615 and 1609. Everywhere are the solid monolith lintels and huge corner-stones which recall the Etruscan building. We inquire for Erminia, who is the aunt of our peasant friend Beppa, and Erminia comes out, a handsome, black-eyed woman with a face like a Roman empress. She welcomes us to her house, where the walls and furniture are all black with age and the smoke from the inevitable *seccatoio.* She presses on us rosy apples whose exquisite colour is equalled by their hardness (it seems impossible for mountain fruit to ripen), and expresses many hospitable wishes that she had some good wine to set before us; "But you know,

signora, we poor things must think ourselves lucky if we have our *necci* and *polenta*."

Our party is large, we fill Erminia's room as, seating ourselves on the smoke-tinted chairs, we look round on the universal blackness. A few steps of dark wood lead to an inner room, where we perceive several sacks, probably the fruits of her harvest of corn and maize stored for the winter; the roof is gay with festoons of red tomatoes and yellowish bulbs of garlic. Another door opens into the bedroom, where we see the usual oaken chest, heavy and black, a huge expanse of bed covered with a dark green quilt curiously fringed, both fringe and texture seeming relics of ancient days, as no doubt they are.

Everything is very rough and primitive, but quite orderly, and there is no sign of want. Indeed, in no case except that of "La Povera" have I seen signs here of absolute want. The children are well fed, albeit they live chiefly on chestnut flour; they are clad in homespun linens and woollens, but are sufficiently covered and have always a neat dress for Sundays and *festas*. They have few requirements, being content to live as their grandmothers and grandfathers lived before them; and having food

and clothing are content.* Poverty, low, abject starvation, such as is common in our more civilised large cities, is rare in the mountains.

But our hostess is proposing to take us out to see the millpond and the orchards. We follow willingly, for the children are growing restless. A little green lane, where the blackberries and haws seem to write "remember old England," on the hedges, leads us to some fields, then a copse, and then the millpond. Erminia seems very proud of this piece of water; but to us there is something dismal about it. The wheel is still and the water dark and motionless, slimy on the surface, where dead leaves drip melancholy from an overhanging tree, which the damps of autumn have doomed to early decay, and on the brink stands a large black cross.

"What is the cross for?" asks Ida; "it looks like a watery grave."

"So it is," replied Erminia, taking her words

* The description given by Micali ("Popoli Antichi," ch. xxiv. p. 201) of the ancient Sabines and other early Italians will to this day fit exactly the women of these mountains: "Le donne loro, si giustamente vantate per la santita de coniugali e materni costume, menavano una vita sobria ed esemplare, tutta intenta a opre villesche, ed a cure famigliari, filare e tessere panni lani non si disdeceva neppure alle femmine di grande stato."

as literal; "a poor young boy fell in once and was drowned, the cross is in his memory."

Away scamper the children, gloomy topics are not relished by them; we too turn with relief from such a dismal spot, and in five minutes find a complete contrast. On a little knoll which overlooks the valley are a few lichened boulders under a group of graceful chestnuts. Close by is a sloping orchard verdant with turf, rich with trees. The children find seats and sofas and jumping places amid the rocks, and we make ourselves happy reclining on the moss where the trees afford a pleasant chequered shade around us, till Erminia carries off the younger ones to pluck plums from the trees.

"This is Arcadia, indeed!" says Aunt Louisa as she listens to the birds singing overhead, the brook rippling as it leaps down to the river, while from the green meadows far below us on the river's banks comes a pleasant lowing of cows and bleating of sheep.

The mother begins to quote old Marlowe's happy description of a similar scene,—

> "And we will sit upon the rocks,
> Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks;
> By shallow rivers to whose falls
> Melodious birds sing madrigals."

"Where are the shepherds?" asks the Antiquary, who delights to bring matter-of-fact into his wife's poetry.

"Why, down in the valley there is a shepherd-girl, like Bopeep, with her sheep. Oh! and she's dancing!" exclaims Ida.

It was indeed the prettiest bit of quaint pastoral: a green waterside meadow, a merry little shepherdess, full of nature's untaught grace, singing and dancing all alone, with her arms waving around her giddy young head.

Now a pretty little maiden comes tripping down from the village, with her fair hair in two long braids, and a bright scarlet check apron. She brings a plate of pears which her mother, seeing the children, had sent for them to eat. We are rather perplexed between our wish to acknowledge such spontaneous kindness from one unknown to us, and our reluctance to risk our children's digestions, for Loli pears, like the apples, are good to the sight but of an incredible hardness within; indeed, the mother tree seems to put more of her wood than her juices into them.

Promising to come oftener next year if we return to the mountains, we take leave of Erminia, who made us repeat three times that we liked Loli very much. She and a party of villagers

accompanied us to the confines of the village, and only then, after repeated handshakings and "I'm so glad you like our Loli," took leave of us. We left her shading her eyes to watch us as we climbed the rugged old mule path into the woods, and the children bounded on before to look for hollow trees to play fairies and dwarfs in.

The people of the mountains must have an idea that their precipitous country is fraught with danger to the unaccustomed. One never meets a person but he adds to his courteous "Good morning, signora," the stereotyped phrase, "Faccia a modo sa" (walk with care). A tiny little maid, Annunziata, who was treading the steep path downwards from the fountain with a large *mezzina* of water on her head, thought it necessary to advise the careful house-mother toiling up slowly to "Fare a modo."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PRIEST'S FESTA.

August 14.—A festal air has pervaded the social atmosphere of the parish for some days. The women and children come home very often from the forest with bundles of wood, which they tell us is to make bonfires on the eve of the priest's *festa*. The bells have been ringing for nine days before the time,—a constant pealing and jangling of four tones fills the valley. The good curate has been made Rector, or Piovano, of Piteglio, and his installation is to take place to-morrow. We hear rumours of his having ordered two entire oxen for the distribution which was to take place this morning, it being a custom for a new-made Rector to provide a dole of bread, meat, and wine, for his parishioners.

One or two of our folk went to Piteglio according to invitation, at seven o'clock, to receive the dole, and returned empty-handed. They found the greatest consternation reigning there, the recipients

were in crowds around the door of the *canonico*, —the almoners were willing, but alas! they had nothing to give. The two oxen expected last night had not yet arrived, the anxious Piovano had kept vigil all night, expecting the sacrificial beasts, but still they came not. A man was despatched on horseback, and at seven this morning they came, walking slowly up to the slaughter before the impatient eyes of the crowd waiting to devour them. The people dispersed, the distribution was postponed till a later hour, and at twelve o'clock we are still in time to witness the giving away of the priest's dole.

In Piteglio several people are standing about with empty flasks and baskets in their hands, but there is not much sign of sacrificial slaughter, except a few ominous dark marks on the pavement near the church. The bells are pealing merrily; we wonder at the untiring energy which can keep them going for nine days without flagging, but as we pass the ancient tower, which was once the tower of the mediæval fortress, the mystery is explained. At a high window sits one of the ringers, he has one leg dangling outside, and grasps a flask of red wine as he sits singing between his sips.

Men who rarely have a chance of tasting wine,

are naturally not unwilling to ring bells with an accompaniment of *vinum ad libitum.*

Down on a little piazzetta there is a scene of more excitement, for the distribution is to take place here. A little shop has been cleared out and its two rooms given up to the priest's use. The shopman, a man nicknamed the "Stella," or star, whom we know from his having sold Harry some rabbits, invites us in to inspect the stores. One room contains a row of sacks full of loaves of bread, and ten barrels of wine on the ground. In the other are a pair of scales, a counter, a butcher's block, the head of an ox and its "internal arrangements;"—of meat, properly so speaking, there is none as yet. Seeing that the poor oxen walked up alive five hours ago, this is not to be wondered at. A number of expectants are ranged on the low wall of the piazzetta, and we place ourselves on an ancient doorstep in the shade, but are no sooner seated than the hospitable villagers exclaim that they could not possibly allow us to stay there, and chairs are very soon placed for us.

Aunt Louisa and the artistic friend set themselves, *con amore*, to study the costumes and take notes. An ancient dame with bright yellow headgear, an embroidered white neckerchief, a blue bodice and tawny-coloured skirt, delights them

extremely, as does a girl with pretty eyes and curly hair, who wears a greenish bodice, with a purple kerchief on her neck and an orange one over her head.

The mother admires a good-tempered father carrying his babe, and a toddling, fair-haired child with an angel face, and one or two grave little maidens sitting down happily against the wall gazing their fill at everybody.

A pale-faced youth attracts our attention. He has a mark of a gash entirely round his throat, just as if he had tried to commit suicide and failed. He begins to explain his disaster very graphically to a friend, telling him with much gesticulation that he was ringing the bells one day this week, when the rope slipped from his hand and swang round his neck, lifting him from the ground with its force. Had not another man, with great presence of mind, stopped the bell, the priest's rejoicings would have been marked by a very sad catastrophe.

Amongst the group baskets and flasks are the most prominent ingredients; those who are too poor to bring flasks come gravely up with the great copper *mezzine*, which they carry to the fountain, and we pity them for the disappointing appearance two litres of wine will have in that

vast cavity. Old Meo, the mad beggar from the Nook, is there, in a costume that sends the artistic friend into ecstasies: a green velveteen coat, a shattered Tyrolese hat, and certain nether garments of greenish grey, patched with blue, which the artist—quoting Ruskin—pronounces perfectly *precious*. With a low bow to us, he finds a vacant seat on a stone, and flask in hand smokes the pipe of peace, making a very picture of himself. Every now and then *feux-de-joie* are fired. Cannon not being available in these mountain wilds, the Piteglese content themselves by firing off a harmless pistol in honour of their beloved pastor.

At length a stir occurs. Two men come up from the *macelleria*, with trays of the fresh meat reeking on their shoulders. The butcher follows, walking in a magisterial manner and smoking as he comes. Behind him, like a sacrificial priestess, is our Loli friend Erminia, looking more like an ancient Roman dame than ever, as she walks with her classical head upborne, and carries three great knives in her hand. The autocratic butcher enters his domain, waves back the eager crowd, takes a knife from the hand of Erminia, and motions a man to place the meat on the block. Then he hacks in a masterly manner, little joints

falling off on all sides, which his attendants pick up to be weighed. He cuts and slashes away in supreme indifference to the shape of joints; all his object is to get as many portions as he can, and no one to be favoured, except perhaps himself, the remains being his. One by one the people pass in and return with their flasks and baskets filled.

Other signs of festivity show themselves. A man sits at his doorstep making coloured lamps with paper; another enters his house with two flying banners; a woman from an upper window hangs out a row of paper lanterns on a string; so we perceive that there is to be a grand illumination to-night.

The cart of the travelling mercer occupies the larger piazza. His goods are displayed, but no one has time to buy; and in the absence of business the *merciaio* calmly takes his pleasure, and is engaged in a game of *briscola*, with very dirty cards and five smoking companions.

Same day, evening.—But the *baldoria*, or fire rejoicings of the evening! Was ever anything equal to that? We are half inclined to become fire worshippers on the spot.

After an unusually early tea we all adjourn at sunset to a wide ledge of reaped cornfields on the side of our own mountain of the Dei Lares. Here

are various strange devices of straw bundles raised on sticks, some single upright posts with wisps of straw bound round them, others a conjunction of posts and crossbars all covered with the inflammable material. These erections are so arranged as to form a gigantic letter P spread out on the hill.

We sit on a ledge to enjoy the sunset beauties still lingering in the western sky. Orange and red clouds glow behind the domed shape of the Prato Fiorito, and the cone of the Pellegrino. A slanting beam falls across between the two, tipping the one with rose and increasing the intensity of blue in the other, and falling on Lucchio, tinges the quaint houses and the ruddy cliff on which they cling with golden light. On the north-west orange-tinted clouds float down the slopes of the Libro Aperto, and its double points arise purple amidst them. Across our own little valley Piteglio sits placid on its throne amongst the woods, and the great hills rise up nearly black against the darkening eastern sky. Our children, with their little barefoot playmates, set themselves to play the old Italian games of the *ambasciatore* and the *villana*. Their shrill little voices make a merry treble to the deeper tones of the Piteglio bells still pealing their rejoicings for the priest.

In this light and natural setting every group forms a picture. Old Gigia spinning as she follows her grazing cows about; the men as they come up the hills with bundles of faggots on their backs; the mothers with their babies in their arms and other toddlers at their skirts; the groups of youths with their primitive firearms,—all are artistic.

At length the short twilight is over, the paper-cased illuminations show dimly one by one from the windows of Piteglio's brown houses across the dell. A volley of guns is fired from thence, and answered by our own men with great gusto. If they cannot hear the reports, the Piteglio men at least have the satisfaction of seeing the shower of sparks from Luigi's gun, for it is an ancient, long barrelled affair, which has the faculty of going off like a squib, and so frightens the pretty Maria, that however near she may be to Luigi, she runs away every time it is fired, which entails a necessity on Luigi to run after her and soothe away her fears. The handsome Domenico has his father's great horse pistol; the Lenini brothers bring forth guns which take a considerable time to load, as that process entails ramming with ramrods of incredible length.

A few minutes later a fire is lighted in the woods high above Piteglio, and lights begin to move

about on the mountain. This is the signal for us. Pietro and his friends take sticks bound with straw, and light up all the inflammable poles, one after the other, till the rector might see his name written in flames on the hills. Of course the children desire similar torches, and with these blazing they run about in the midst like so many fireflies.

The Bettoni have made a big bonfire of faggots; and between flinging fresh wood on this and firing off constant *feux de joie*, all the male part of the community find constant employment. We begin to feel we have stepped back into the primitive ages, and are worshipping Baal on the hills; or that we are ancient Etruscans burning sacred fires to the gods on this very mountain where they worshipped the "Dei Lari" three thousand years ago, when they drove out the Umbrians from their mountain fastnesses.

Then fire answers fire on all the surrounding hills; from the very top of the "Croce a Veglia" a star of flames springs up. The hill behind Piteglio is illuminated; even their hereditary enemies of Popiglio light a fire in the precincts of the towers of the old fortress, and illumine the windows of their straggling village brilliantly. Our people do not, however, take this as a per-

sonal compliment. They say, "Oh, the Popiglese do not light up for us, but only because it is a general *festa*.

Little Loli, down in the valley, being so hidden that its lights could not be seen, comes out splendidly by sending up skyrockets to join the fires above it. Truly, the "very hills rejoice" at the promotion of the good priest; as many stars gleam from the woods as look down on them from above.

August 15, *Assumption of the Virgin.*—At last the very day of the *festa*, in which the priest blends his honours with those of the Virgin. Excitement reigns from the earliest hours, but it is a sad excitement. A thick cloud envelops us and the whole valley; it is rolled down to our very lawn and hides the trees from our view: it rains softly and persistently. We hear carriage loads of priestly visitors pass by, but our own prospect seems small. The children, who have talked of the procession for days, are very melancholy. But mountain clouds are not very permanent; this one dissolves itself by degrees, and its shreds float away up the mountain sides like mist, leaving so much pale sunlight that at half-past nine o'clock we are among the village crowd at the church doors.

Such a picturesque crowd as it is! Every one who can afford a new dress and smart head kerchief has done so. Mothers, whose purses would not stretch into a gown for themselves, are content to clothe their babies afresh, and little boys of three years old toddle about in long trousers of preternatural size, with their plump little hands in the pockets thereof; and tiny girls wear gowns and kerchiefs stiff with newness, and look like diminutive grandmothers.

Pietro has his coat absolutely on to-day, instead of on his shoulder. He rejoices in a new corded felt hat, and carries his horse pistol in his hand. All his pretty daughters wear their festal dresses and their corals. One young woman, clad in black, has an orange head-kerchief, a huge coral necklace, and a gilt bracelet worn *outside* her sleeve.

Now a stir comes from the church, a group of men in the *loggia* fire a deafening volley from their crazy firearms right against the old tower; and presently a procession of priests, headed by the Preposto of San Marcello, comes out, and goes to the *canonico* to fetch the parish priest who is to be installed He is brought in great state from his house to the church, at the door of which the provost

reads the document giving him legal possession. Then he is taken to the different parts of the church, and a "Te Deum" service is performed, during which, and the Mass that follows, various little ceremonies take place. He is robed by his colleagues in sundry vestments, he is incensed, is taken to the confessional, sits a moment there, and goes back to the altar with his ecclesiastical attendants. The churchwarden next places the parish books in his hand with some Latin formula, of which we only hear "In nomine Domini." After the Te Deum follows a "Messa Cantata," in which, as there is no efficient choir, a party of priests kindly ascend to the gallery and chant the responses to the four who conduct the Mass at the altar. So many priests have never been known in Piteglio before. They sing vigorously, the rattling old organ, with its wheezing, rope-pulled bellows, keeps up an independent accompaniment of a joyous nature; and all the white-robed procession-men who fill half the church, and all the yellow and red kerchiefed women behind them, tell their beads, equally independently, and evidently think the service very grand.

Its solemnity is disturbed by the military salutes from the *loggia;* for as each part of the Mass ends, about a dozen men fire their guns,

matchlocks, and pistols against the stones of the tower, to make the sound reverberate better.

We begin to think we are a crowd of frightened refugees, saying our prayers in the ancient fortress at the time of a siege by the men of Popiglio. I doubt if the artillery of any siege in the days when the church tower was a fortress-keep, made more noise than these crazy old guns.

After the Gospel the new rector makes his address to his parishioners; and a more simple, pathetic little appeal never reached the hearts of a village populace, whether Protestant or Romanist. He begins by speaking of the responsible office to which he had been called, not by his own merits, but by God's grace; saying that before, whilst only curate, he might at any time have been called away from them, but that now he and they would live together as long as his life lasted. Then, enlarging on his responsibilities, he speaks of the duties and trials of a priest's office, adding, that as he is placed above his people, he is full in the sight of them all, and that every one could see and notice his least fault. Then, with a touching appeal, he said, "And you know your pastor is not an angel, but only a mortal dressed in the frail garb of humanity, and prone to all the weaknesses of

men. It is only prayer and the especial goodness of God, who has called me to the office, that give me courage to be the leader of so beloved a flock."

Next he enlarges on their duty to him; that they must accept his teaching, not only in outward reverence, but in earnest practice, because his words are not his own, but are spoken by him as Christ's ambassador, and in despising his teaching they put the Saviour to scorn.

He promises that with God's help he will always be near to help them in their troubles or joys. Has a mother borne a child?—he will be the first to open the door of the church and receive the new angel into the fold given to his charge. When the youths and maidens grow older, and can approach more nearly the sacred mysteries, he will lead them to their first communion. Did they love?—he will bless their marriages. Were they sick?—he will be at hand to soothe their pain and comfort their troubled souls. Have they sinned and repented?—he will lead them back to God for pardon. When death comes near, he will go with them to the eternal gates, and give Jesus into their hands to accompany them. Then, lifting his clasped hands upwards, he prays God to bless his ministry, to be always with him and his

beloved flock; and with a prayer also to the Madonna, he ends with his blessing, saying, "My life is no more my own; I live for you all, my people and my charge."

There is perhaps nothing particularly new in all this, but the pathos which the words have in that most pathetic of languages, the expression and feeling an Italian can throw into his eyes and his action, render it a perfectly touching bit of eloquence. The crowd of simple villagers listen, smile, and wipe their eyes in turn, and glance at our little party as much as to say, "What do you think of our priest's eloquence?" A double volley of firing from the outside succeeds the end of the sermon, another salutes the procession when it issues from the church after the Mass, and a third as the procession passes the chief piazza.

These ceremonies over, we take our way through the woodland path down to Harry's bridge, and up the old mule-track that winds through the cornfields under the noonday sun, leaving the Piteglese to finish their day of rejoicing. There is a grand dinner at the *canonica*, where the new rector feasts twelve ecclesiastical friends at one table and fifteen civilians at another. His health is drunk, and complimentary sonnets, hymns, and *stornelli*, read or recited in his praise.

There is a second service in the church at vespers, also a supper at the rector's house, with more *brindisi* and more sonnets. The *gens d'armes*, who keep watch over the little community, are also feasted, and in return give the populace permission to fire their salutes as often as they like, of which concession they take full benefit. The paper lanterns again shine forth from the windows, and the bells peal merrily, till night at length puts an end to this memorable *festa*.

It quite affects the housemother's spirits to think how tired the priest must be after it all. As for the Antiquary, as he sits reading the Latin odes and *carmi* addressed in congratulation to the priest, he interests himself in tracing this custom back to the Romans and Etruscans who, as Micali ("Storia degli Popoli Antichi," chap. xxiii.) says, were accustomed to celebrate feasts or triumphs with congratulatory verses, and that even this custom was an old one originating in the *carmi*, sacred or war songs addressed to the protecting deities.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BALL ON THE THRESHING-FLOOR.

August 22.—To-day we have an impromptu *festa da ballo.* It is one of the numerous holidays, the octave of a fête of the Virgin, and the *contadini*, having dutifully devoted the morning to Mass, as dutifully give the evening to pleasure.

While resting at the gate after our return from a walk, we notice a kind of expectancy on the faces of the girls who are seated by the church in festal dress. Presently a party of maidens from Piteglio comes down the road on the right. Within five minutes a dozen or two of boys appear up the hill on the left. Then a sound of singing in the distance,—the girls glance across the fields and smile. The chorus of male voices draws nearer, and several young men stroll up with arms intertwined, and their voices joined in a song of which one or two take the air, and the others keep up a *tum-tum* accompaniment, giving the effect of a stringed

instrument. These look sheepishly round on the assembled company, and then huddle up in a close group as far away from the maidens as they can, for such is Italian country etiquette. Then comes a detachment of married men, and with them a stranger carrying a huge accordion.

Various smiles and meaning glances pass through the assembly. Much wondering what it all portends, we determined to stay and see the end. After a time the musician is seated, and begins to play in an experimental manner. The young men's legs commence shuffling, as if they were being inspired by degrees; their arms jerk in time; they glance at the girls, who smile and blush.

A little whispering, and then Luigi says, "Come up to my *aja* (threshing-floor); there is more room." The whole party moves *en masse*, the men standing back till the women have passed, and in five minutes, behold the Bettoni's large *aja* is turned into a ball room, we taking our seats in the doorway of his house, which forms one side. The dark woods rise up on the left; a low wall, soon filled with the "wall flowers" of the party, is on the right; on the west, the picturesque cattle-shed, which is of solid Tuscan architecture, forms a foreground to the glorious mountains behind which glow blue and red under a golden sunset.

But now we are here, the music is ready, who is to dance? The maidens are shy and will not come out; they shrink behind their elders, who, on their part, declare their dancing days are over, or they are too old; so after a long talk the youths embrace each other and several couples start on a waltz by themselves.

That is soon given up, however, and declaring that there is no fun in dancing without partners, they determine to obtain them like their Roman ancestors of old. The bold youths make a dash at the damsels, who shrink up in a corner in a crowd, but all to no purpose; the young men grasp them by the hand exclaiming, "Come now, don't pretend so; you know quite well you are going to dance;" they still hold back, but their pursuers take their two hands, and with still stronger words drag them off, step by step, as the Sabine wives were dragged in the days of yore. Like their maternal ancestors, the girls once captured become willing enough, and dance a mazourka with good spirit.

The leader of the fray is a tall young man in a blue serge suit of a sailor cut. He has a pale handsome face, black wavy hair, and a pair of eyes full of fun and fire. His best colleague is a young fellow in a pink shirt and yellowish bag

trousers, shaped like a pair of bellows, but wearing neither coat nor waistcoat. This youth, who might be called vice-master of ceremonies, gives himself body and soul to the dance, and in his agony of apprehension lest any one should go wrong, works himself up to a state of supernatural gravity very much at variance with the nature of his occupation. His eyes become round and fixed, his mouth elongates, his very ears appear pricked up with anxiety, and after great and solemn exertions, he wipes his perplexed face with a wondrous reddish yellow handkerchief, on which cabalistic designs appear in black.

There are many types of rusticity among the—

> "Many a youth and many a maid
> Dancing in the chequered shade."

A certain village dandy, for instance, who had expended great thought on his dress. A red scarf encircles his waist, and an Indian one knotted round his neck; a pink feather is stuck up in his hat, and a red rose adorns his button hole. Add to this a round, ruddy face and hair of a deep auburn (to speak in complimentary terms), and you see our glowing hero.

But more conspicuous still is the stylish dandy who has arrived in a black suit and white necktie,

which is nearly as incongruous on a mountain *aja* as a *carbonaro* in a Florentine drawing-room. He is indefatigable in the dance, however, and tires out partner after partner. Then there is the boy with exuberant spirits, who dances with all his might, and wheels round his partners unmercifully, but carries so smiling a face under the brim of his new straw hat that no one has the heart to scold him. The youths smoke short cigars, and fortunately their amiable partners do not seem to object to the pungent fumes which are puffed into their faces.

The pretty Maria is a good waltzer, and has plenty of partners; her solemn admirer Luigi, on the contrary, is not given to dancing, but leans in a Napoleonic attitude against his door-post, doing the honours by entering into polite conversation with the ladies of our party, while he follows with his eyes every movement of Maria.

The best dancer is said to be a handsome young woman, but she steadily refuses every offer this evening. On being pressed, she says that her husband is away in the Maremma, and that she never dances in his absence. This is quite the traditional Roman virtue, is it not?

The Adonis in blue next proposes a quadrille (*quadriglia*). Doubtful of the success of this among

what looks like so much raw material, we suggest that they should dance a *trescone*, which we are very anxious to see. The *trescone* is to the Tuscans what the *tarantella* is to the Neapolitans,—the old national dance. But our proposal does not meet with approval, they have not yet got enough spirit for the *trescone*, and prefer the *quadriglia*. The blue youth takes on himself to be M. C., and marshals the couples into their places with pushes and pulls, till a square of sixteen couples is formed.

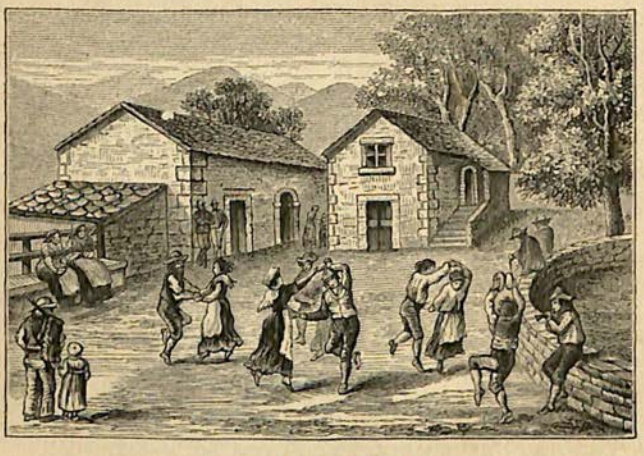
"Now, then, *musica!*" he shouts to the player, who forthwith strikes up, and we prepare ourselves to see "confusion worse confounded." Never were we more mistaken! Our Adonis shouts out the figures in French like the M. C. of a Florentine ball, and all the coatless swains and country lasses follow their orders of "*chassez croisez*" and "*changez vos dames*," as if they had learned dancing all their lives. They choose the fashionable *impromptu* quadrille too, in which the leader alters or invents figures as he likes. They perform the prettiest mazy evolutions, and the most intricate transpositions,—it is like a living kaleidoscope. Then a waltz follows, danced with great spirit by all, including our pretty nurse.

We are amused watching the vicissitudes of a

certain Mass book, which is passed from hand to hand as its successive holders go forth to dance, and is in danger several times of being carried into the whirl. At length the spirit of the dance has thoroughly imbued them, and shouts arise of "*Il Trescone! Il Trescone!*" The men seize their partners, and holding them in the old-fashioned way at arms' length, begin to whirl and jump, to turn and wave till the threshing-floor seems bewitched. Such a shaking of right toes and left heels! such a "weaving of magic paces," and waving of linked hands over two heads, that one begins to wonder how many elbows will be dislocated. The musician plays faster and faster, the dancers spin and weave their mazes with wild speed;— the music slackens, they dance more slowly and seem weary,—the music ceases, they all stop as if turned to stone. After a moment's pause it goes on again, and the dance continues till it wears itself out.

So we have seen a *trescone*, and like the *tarentella* as danced in the old temples at Baiæ, it is a revelation. We wonder who was its inventor, and who first danced it. The Antiquary thinks that the Umbrian and Etruscan maidens, who successively occupied these mountains, were its originators, giving as proof the figures of dancing women clad in light garments which are depicted on the

walls of Etruscan tombs. Truly the attitudes of those ancient *ballerine* are very similar to the Tuscan maidens' *trescone*, the uplifted and pointed toe, the arms weaving mazes around the head, are almost identical, and when, as is often the case, they dance to the sound of the double pipe, the Etrus-



DANCING THE TRESCONE.

can *subulo*, which has survived only in these mountain districts, one seems carried back to remote ages.

But now comes a new sensation; we are aware of a gradually increasing group round two men (strangers) who sit on the wall farthest from us. Luigi tells us they are "poete" (*improvisatore*), and

we eagerly approach to listen to their inspirations.

This is another remnant of ancient civilization, which is lingering out in remote parts. In Etruscan times poets (similar to our Welsh bards), were indispensable in the celebration of any public event.



ETRUSCAN DANCER AND SUBULO PLAYER.
(*From a tomb at Grotto Margi.* From "*Dennis's Etruria.*")

They composed the *carmi bellici*, or war songs; they sang odes of congratulation to the victor at his triumph, and odes of praise to the host at great feasts. In Italian cities, to the present day, the ode or sonnet written by some friend of the family, and printed on fine paper, is an indispensable part of every wedding, as the "eulogy" is of

every funeral. Any great work of art is celebrated by complimentary sonnets, like those written on Michael Angelo's "David" when it was set up, and odes are generally read at a ceremonious public banquet; but except in remote mountain regions, the true *improvisatore* is no more. A famous *improvisatore*, named Beatrice, died near Pistoja some years ago, at the age of nearly ninety, and the spirit of poesy was on her till the time of her death.

But we will return to the two "poete" before us: they sit on the low wall, clad in fustian, and look very much like ordinary people, until we study their faces, when the poetic element shows itself. One is a young shoemaker, but must have been highly favoured by St. Crispin, for he has large melancholy eyes, rich curled hair, and a general appearance of intellectual spirituality.

His elder colleague is neither handsome nor intellectual, if we except his broad forehead, which is nearly hidden, however, beneath a mass of rough fair hair. As we draw near, their brows are knit with thought,—the dancing audience lower their laughing tones to audible whispers in respect to native talent, and after a time the expectant hush is broken by the voice of the elder man. He begins, in blank verse and a monotonous chanting tone, to regret that his muse is so poor, and calls on

Minerva to come to his assistance. Here he lifts his eyes to the evening sky, and we suppose Minerva responds to his prayer, for his vacant eye brightens, and he launches forth in a complimentary strain, lauding the Antiquary and his family for having so well adapted themselves to mountain life, although they be *forestieri* (strangers). Here the young man takes up the strain, re-echoing the compliments to the host, and weaving them in with all kinds of classical allusions, as if the "Great Nine" of Olympus were their daily companions.

This mythological knowledge seems inherent in the Tuscans; they learn of the gods and heroes as we learn of Jack the Giant Killer and Tom Thumb. The melancholy "poete" brings the tears to some eyes by an allusion to an unfortunate love. He depicts a maiden as when first he saw her with a rose at her breast and happiness in her bright face, and then again he beholds her, and lo! the rose hangs withered and unheeded on her sobbing bosom, her eyes are dull and sad, and the glory of the joy of youth has departed. All this largely interspersed with mythological characters: she is compared to Ariadne deserted by Theseus, to Andromache bereft of Hector, and many other types of women suffering alone.

After about half an hour of improvisation, the dancing party begins to grow restless. These merry damsels are not deserted by their swains, on the contrary they are all impatient to lead them to the dance. They whisper to Luigi to stop the flood of verse, they look imploringly at the Antiquary, but all to no purpose till some one whispers to the mother that a party is ready to dance the *galetta.* This draws away the ladies, the master taking advantage of the first full stop to thank the "poete" heartily and admiringly, and from Olympus we descend to the Apennines, and sublunary dancing begins again.

The *galetta* is also a national dance, quite different to the *trescone.* One woman takes two men, or *vice versâ;* it is in parties of three, like a reel. They first set to each other; after a few minutes the woman turns off, winding in and out, the men closely following her. After a chase of some duration, the woman turns suddenly round and begins a peculiar rapid shuffling step with both feet, the men standing opposite doing the same with great energy, till, tired of this, the chase recommences. The grace of the woman's fugitive figure as she flies her pursuers, glancing archly over her shoulder at them, is a thing not to be forgotten.

The sun has set by this time, even the golden light has died out from the western sky, and a long streak of *acqua-marine* green is the sole light in the heavens behind the black domed mountain tops. Prudent mothers take their girls away, the dance is over, only the youths form a close group round the musician and join in a wonderful ballad, the very one of the "ride on a goat," which they had bought of the pedlar a few weeks ago. So interested does the musician grow in the wonderful adventures of the hero, that he forgets to play his accompaniment, but joins with all his deep voice instead.

A *rispetto* follows, in which the words are as usual composed of "amore" and "questo cuore," and then the party breaks up. The maidens withdraw in groups, taking the upper path across the fields; the youths, with arms intertwined, in long rows, four or five abreast, stroll off by the high road, singing as they go, till their voices die away in the darkening distance.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SORELLACCIA.

ONE of the characters of the hamlet with whom I have most sympathy is a poor woman called by every one "La Povera" (the poor creature). La Povera is the wife of one of the three married brothers Andrucci. But while the two others have their bits of land, their sheep, and their cows, poor Maso has nothing.

When a young man wants to scrape a little money together to buy his household goods or land, he goes for a winter to the Maremma, where there is work at that season, when there is none in the mountains. Maso went one year to the Maremma, but besides his earnings he brought back the fever, which soon made away with his savings and hindered him from even doing his own work for the summer.

Maremma fever is a terrible disease which, when once it lays hold of a victim, does not let him go till his health is ruined for years. So poor Maso

got into debt, and his wife, with her three little boys, had and has a hard time. They cultivate a bit of land belonging to a man at Piteglio, but the half profits on it only amount to a sack of corn at harvest time, a few beans, and a little maize. She goes out to these few fields with a round basket on her head, in which a little wizened baby lies asleep, a tiny, barefoot, toddling boy clinging to her patched skirts on one side, an older boy lost in huge trousers on the other, and a goat following her led by a string.

The goat belongs to one of her more prosperous relations, but she takes charge of it in consideration of being allowed a little of its milk to nourish the baby, for whom she has no maternal supply.

"La Povera" is not a whining nor discontented woman; if you did not ask, you would never hear from herself that she is in want, and yet she often has nothing to give the children when they are hungry.

Their little supply of chestnut flour is used up, and they will have no more till the gathering in October. They obtained a sack of maize on credit, and that is nearly gone, yet she never complains, and always meets one with a smile.

To-day she is in greater distress than usual, for their taxes are in arrear, and the *gens*

d'armes are coming to seize her furniture. Having heard this from one of the neighbours, we hasten to pay her a visit. Her house looks like herself, very poverty-stricken, the wooden stairs let in the light through cracks on each step, the inner walls are of wood, as black as ebony, for the only fireplace is a *seccatoio* which has no chimney, the floors are full of holes and pitfalls,



ETRUSCAN JAR. (*From a tomb.*)

and the furniture consists of rough, home-made chairs, stools, and a table black and ricketty.

"La Povera" laughs bitterly as she shows us her squalid domain.

"There, signora!" she says, "what will the soldiers find here to make money out of? They can but carry away our bed," and she points to the inner room where is a large mattress spread on tressels.

Indeed, it seems to me a cruel farce to tax poor souls who have not bread to eat. After a little talk about her troubles, and a little gratitude to the "mother" for relieving her fears of the soldiers, she says, "Ah, this is a sad life! I often think I am like the Sorellaccia (bad sister), and hope to be happier *la su* (up there)," pointing heavenwards.



TUSCAN ORCIA, FOR HOLDING OIL OR WATER, 1878.

"Who was the Sorellaccia?" I ask.

"Have you never heard! It is one of our Pistojese legends, and I am often comforted to think of it. There were once two sisters and a brother. The brother became a *frate*, one sister also took to the religious life and became a nun; but the other one married, became mother of a large family, and had a hard life—like me," sighs the *povera*, kissing the tiny baby on her lap. "The

others used to call her the Sorellaccia, because she made no religious profession. Once the brother came to see her on a Sunday, and found her in her old gown, doing house work.

"'What!' he cries, 'are you not going to church?'

"'To church!' she says; 'Who's to cook my husband's dinner and feed the baby and mind all the children, if I go away?'

"'But,' asks the *frate*, quite horrified, 'do you *never* go to Mass?'

"'The last time I went was before the baby was born,—about a month since.'

"'Well!' said the *frate*, 'go to-day, and I will stay here and mind the house and children.'

"Away went the Sorellaccia to Mass, and the *frate* was driven out of his mind with the crying children and the troubles of the cooking, till, when she came home, he said, 'Thank Heaven you are back again before I go mad! There, sister, if you have patience to put up with this every day, you certainly go a long way towards earning your rest in heaven.'

"Soon after this the *frate* died, and went to heaven, where St. Peter was so pleased with him he made him doorkeeper under himself. One day St. Peter called out, 'Open the doors wide, as

wide as you can, for a great saint is coming.' So the *frate* flung open the gates of heaven expecting to see a bishop or abbess enter in state, but what was his surprise when his Sorellaccia came in with beautiful white robes and a happy smile on her face, and St. Peter himself made her welcome like a queen, for he said, 'She has done her duty in that state of life to which she was called in diligence and patience.'

"After a while St. Peter said again, 'Open the gate.'

"'Must I open wide?' asked the *frate.*

"'No; a little bit will do, this is not much of a saint.' But when she came, it was the holy sister, who had always led a religious life in a convent! And this set the *frate* a-thinking that God does not judge as men do, and that outward religion is not much in His eyes."

"That is a very pretty legend," says the mother, as the poor thing finishes, with tears in her eyes; "and I am sure it must comfort you, for you show great patience under trial."

"Ah, *si; ci vuole pazienza,* we cannot all be fortunate; but you, signora, have made me fortunate to-day," and we leave her kissing her little half-clad baby.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MAD BEGGAR.

ONE of "La Povera's" virtues is her kindness in giving a room and clean straw to a poor old beggar called Meo, whom none of her less struggling neighbours care to admit into their houses. Meo is one of the many namesakes of the Nook, and belongs to the soil: he is a lunatic and a character. His clothes are the horror of the mother and the delight of the artistic friend, who declares his faded velveteen coat to be inimitable as a study in blending different mellow greens, while a certain blue patch on his olive colour nether garments is pronounced "perfectly artistic." Meo spends much of his time in prayer; and is frequently to be seen prostrate before the door of the chapel on the little piazza at our gate. If while wandering in the wood he espies our party at a distance, he falls prone on the ground like a Moslem, and passing we hear very loud a fervent petition on behalf of the *forestieri*. He

spends his time in going to the neighbouring villages gathering crusts of bread as alms, and comes home to make pap of them for his evening meal.

Having taken us entirely under his protection he never begs of us, unless his day's begging has failed to provide his supper, when he brings his empty *pentola* (pipkin) to the Villa to get it filled.

At first the children were very much afraid of him, and ran away when he approached; this greatly distressed old Meo, who came to tell the mother his troubles, saying that he did not want to harm the children, but that they hurt him very much in running away from him. Next day he came to her clasping his hands with joy, exclaiming, "They are no longer afraid of me!"

One day Meo had lost his favourite pipe, and sought for hours for it in vain. At length he found it in the pocket of his coat which he had left lying across the bridge. Whereupon he took up the coat and thrashed it well with his stick, because it had hidden his pipe so long and given him so much trouble!

Luigi has some good stories about Meo which prove that there is method in his madness. Once, in Pistoja, he pretended to have a fit in the street, and the "misericordia" came, clad in their black

hoods, and placing him on the bier carried him tenderly to the hospital. When they lifted the cover to remove him into a bed, the sick man sprang up quite lively and said, "Thank you, good brethren; you have brought me to a place where I can get some food. Hunger is my complaint, and a very bad one it is."

Imagine the feelings of the black-robed confraternity!

There are rumours that Meo, when his madness was the passion of youth, caused the death of a shepherd girl in the chestnut woods, and so a slight feeling of awe has crept over the amusement with which we watch his vagaries.

He must be a dangerous inmate to the house of "La Povera." She says she sleeps in constant dread of awaking to find her old wooden house in flames, for Meo has a great fancy for bonfires, and sleeps on loose straw with several matches always loose in his pockets. Once the owner of the Villa gave him a nice mattress; but such was Meo's delight in playing with fire, that he pulled out all the straw to make a blaze with.

This evening he announced that he is going on a long pilgrimage to see the pope at Rome. He says he shall walk at night when it is cool, and sleep under the trees in the day-time.

Beppa, who was sitting at the gate spinning, laughed incredulously. Meo, pointing his thumb at her, said, "They won't believe it; but nevertheless, I am going a long journey soon. When I am gone they will begin to believe me. I shall creep off alone some day."

* * * * *

Postscript added after leaving the mountains, Nov. 20. — Poor Meo little knew how true his words were. He indeed set out alone on his long journey, and no one knew the hour of his departure.

In the time of the chestnut gathering, when the woods were full of people, the Bettoni family were picking up chestnuts in one of their holdings near the deep little river-bed of the waterfall. Luigi was removing his half-filled sack to a position a little higher, when, turning his head beneath its weight, he saw poor old Meo lying in the brooklet, face downwards, amongst the rocks. He dropped the sack of chestnuts in his horror, and sprang down amidst the boulders to find the poor old vagabond cold and dead— a true vagabond's death, alone on the bosom of Mother Earth. Luigi called for assistance, and a little crowd of awestruck men carried the corpse

home and sent for the doctor. He thought the poor old man must have been dead two days, but did not believe him to have been drowned. Luigi said he had gone on a longer journey than usual in the autumn,—was missing for a month,—and came home very weary and ragged during the chestnut gathering, saying he was tired of life, and thought he should soon make an end of it. Luigi consoled him, saying this was an extra good year for chestnuts, and no one need suffer hunger all the winter; adding, "Do not be down-hearted, Meo; you know we should not let you starve."

But whether death came unexpectedly and mercifully, or whether the poor old man in his lunacy sought it for himself, no one can tell. He had a great funeral, for he was known by every one around. In the mountains there are no upholsterers, and no fees, no hirelings carry the dead to the grave; what is done is spontaneous. The church bell rings, and all who knew the dead or wish to show respect come at the call. There is a church society, to which all the men who are able pay a certain small subscription, and are provided with the white garments which they use at processions and funerals. These come in their white robes with their torches, women, maidens, and children join them with candles in their

hands. Forty or fifty couples followed old Meo, the beggar, to his grave.

We wished we could have seen that long line of lights winding its way across the valley to the shrine with the black cross, where the priest waited for it and led it up to the church. Poor old Meo!

CHAPTER XXXII.

A LEAF PARTY.

A SPECIES of entertainment, which we have named a "leaf party," has been much in vogue lately. It is on the plan of the American bee, asking one's friends and neighbours to help do one's work. As the principal food of the mountaineers consists of *necci*, or chestnut-flour-cakes, and as *necci* cannot be made without the large chestnut leaves to bake them in, it is necessary that each household should lay in a sufficient stock of leaves in a convenient form to last the winter, when the trees are bare.

The harvest being over, "leaf parties" begin. Each household takes it in turn to have an evening to tie up the leaves (spicolare le foglie), and all the members of the hamlet come to help. It is of the greatest importance to pluck the leaves with the waxing moon, or they will not keep.

Having expressed a wish to see a "leaf party," our *contadino* Luigi, whose turn it was yesterday,

proposed to hold his in our *cortile.* During the day we had seen troops of girls going into the woods with round baskets on their heads, singing in chorus as they stepped along with the peculiar upright grace that a burden borne on the head gives to the bearer. They came home later, still laughing and singing, and their *ceste* piled up with green chestnut branches, were placed in our quaint *cortile.* At eight o'clock the visitors began to arrive, carrying their own chairs. An old lamp of a Roman form was hung on the ornamental iron grating of a window. The pretty young girls all placed themselves in a row against the wall, with the light shining on their bright-coloured kerchiefs and glossy black braids, the married women grouped on each side of them. A row of *ceste,* filled with piles of branches, were in front of the women, and the men took their places on the other side of the baskets, the sober, middle-aged ones on chairs, the young fellows on the big stone table in the centre of the courtyard, round a huge pile of green, in every attitude possible which combined a facility for swinging the legs with a view of the rest of the party. We and the children, who were delighted at anything new, took our places amongst them all, and commenced forthwith to learn the way to "spicolare le foglie."

The art consists in taking branches and plucking off the leaves, one by one, to make a bundle of forty or fifty. Every leaf must be turned the same way, and these neat bundles are bound with a flexible twig which has been stripped. Then all the packets of leaves are strung to make a large garland. This is hung out of the windows for a few days to dry; so that about this season the cottages acquire quite a festive appearance.

One of the three grandmothers, who was seated



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next me, told us that when dried carefully the leaves did not become decayed, but when required for use she only had to put them into hot water and they became like fresh leaves again.

At first work proceeded very diligently, branches were waving about in all directions, and hands plunging into the *ceste* for more. The chief amusement seemed to be watching the "signoria" learning mountain arts. But a diversion soon occurred, a daring youth flung a well-made bunch

of leaves into the lap of a diligent maiden, who was not slow to return it. The sober Luigi pelted the pretty Maria most persistently, besides supplying her with all the largest-leaved branches to make her own bundles. Our cook, who had never been at a leaf party before, proved fully equal to the occasion: on receipt of one bunch she sent back two, saying, "Those who make presents to me are never losers, I pay double" (Io pago il



TUSCAN PEASANT'S LAMP, 1878.

doppio). This of course produced a laugh all round, and the ice was broken.

The youths at the round table struck up a *stornello*, not very complimentary to the fair sex, which provoked the three pretty daughters of Pietro into a response, the knights of the round table replied again, and the vocal badinage was carried on endlessly.

The following was the first challenge of the knights,—

"Fior di limone
A limonare mi son messo a fare
Per non aver fortuna nell 'amore.'"

O lemon flower,
I am obliged to take to lemon-selling
Because I have no luck in loving.

The girls replied saucily to the same tune,—

"Giovinottino dalle pretensioni
Volevi cento scudi nelle mane
Con cento scudi c'ho meglio occasione."

O pretentious youth!
You want my hundred scudi;
But with a hundred scudi I have better chances.

This roused the ire of the young men, who with very loud voices struck up, telling them in a very uncompromising *stornello*, to go to their mothers for consolation, for they were not going to marry, and if they were they would not choose wives from them.

At this a shower of bundles were aimed at the daring songsters. The young girls' heads met in a cluster conspiring vengeance, and then they burst out in the shrillest of voices,—

"Ora zitto ti dico addio
E ti dico in verità;
Un cuore come il mio
Dove tu puoi trovar."

Now be quiet, I say Addio in right earnest,
For a heart like mine where will you find again?

A shout of "Bravi" greeted this bit of defiance. It is true that one young man tried a reply, but was only met with a shout of laughter from the girls, who exclaimed, "Oh, listen to him! how he sings out of tune," and the solitary champion of the round table finished up suddenly out of the key, and retired discomfited.

The youths next started a more complimentary strain and sang the following *rispetto.* I give it in Italian to show the difference in form and metre between *stornelli* and *rispetti.*

Stornelli are always triplets, the first line being short, and having usually reference to some flower or fruit.

Rispetti are in eight lines, the last two repeating in different words the idea of the preceding couplet.

"Tu pensi che nel mare non ci sia rena,
Tu pensi di passare senza nave,
Tu pensi lo cor mio non ne abbia pena,
Tu pensi che ti voglio abbandonare.
Avanti ch' io ti lascio e l' abbandono,
Anche l' arancie faranno i limoni,
Avanti t' abbandono e ch' io ti lasci,
Anche i limoni faranno l' arancie."

This was very well received, and after a little time the girls sang very sweetly the following,—

"Era di Maggio se vi ricordate
Che noi ci cominciammo a ben volere,
Erano fiorite le rose nell' orto
E le ciliege diventaron' nere,
Le ciliege nere e pere moscate
Siete il trionfo degli inamorati,
Ciliege nere e pere moscatelle
Siete il trionfo delle dame belle."

At this point the strains of an accordion were heard, and cries of, "Ah! bravo! Giovanni of Piteglio has brought his music." In a minute Garibaldi's hymn of war rose in shouts in the moonlight, till the walls of the old courtyard echoed again, and the accordion player put all his strength into the accompaniment.

The *ceste* being almost empty by this time, a few of the young men and women left their elders to finish, and, inspired by the music, plunged into the mazes of the *trescone*, the national dance of the Tuscans; and at ten o'clock we left them still—

"putting forth the charm
Of woven paces and of weaving hands"

in the silver lights and dark shades of the moonlit old courtyard by the dropping fountain.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE VIRGIN'S BIRTHDAY.

September 8.—This is a great day in the mountains, and indeed all over Italy.

The people of the Nook, not having a *festa* of their own (it being only a hamlet), are gone in all directions to join other parishes. Some to San Marcello, where there are fireworks and a *fiera* (like our fair, a collection of itinerary salesmen of all kinds).

Fiore Andrucci, whose only little girl is named Celestina, has taken her and his wife to a neighbouring village where is a shrine to Santa Celestina, that the child may have her patron saint's benediction.

In the darkness of last night a party of six of the Lenini relations departed in Pietro's cart to go to a shrine called the "Eremita," some miles beyond the Bagni di Lucca. That neat little housewife, Matilde, had been very busy baking bread and making cakes, to take with

them on their picnic-pilgrimage. She says the Eremita is a large church hollowed out of the solid rock in one of the Lucchese mountains. It was made as a shrine for a miraculous image of the Madonna which was found sculptured in stone by a holy hermit who once had his cell there. The church is open during the whole of September, and parties of pilgrims are coming and going all the month. As they are mostly from distant towns, the women are allowed to sleep in the church; for the men there is a little hut near.

September 10.—The pilgrims have returned; Matilde who is sitting on her *aja* in front of her house door, is very pleased to tell us all her adventures. She places chairs for us, and taking up her work, a new dress she is making for herself, plunges at once into the subject.

"Oh, signora!" she exclaims, "such a night we had; there was a crowd as great as if Mass were being celebrated, and when we were all shut into the church at night, you may believe we got little sleep—we poor women. There are only a few wooden benches, and of course they were taken by the first, all the others had to sit on the floor, leaning against the pillars or the wall, or to lie down flat on the stones. Some rolled

up their gowns to make a pillow, and a pretty sight they were with their bare legs stretched out. And then the noise! Some talked and chattered as if they were in the market place, some said their prayers aloud, others got singing and laughing, so that nobody closed an eye. I don't think the men fared much better in their *capanna*."

"No, indeed," replies her husband, who is at home for his dinner rest. "We had not too much of either room or quiet. They say we go there for religion, but to me it seems more like a fair, and not so much *divertimento* either. It does not feel right to turn a church into a hostelry at night, and a place of prayers in the day. Why, last year some women went to sleep upon the very altar, they did not even respect that, and the Holy Madonna close above them all the time!"

Matilde shows her approval of Annibale's sentiments by a smiling nod and the expressive interjection "Gia!" adding, "But it is a beautiful church, signora; only fancy, the whole of it hewn in the solid rock, nothing is built by masons except a bit of the façade. There are great pillars that look like marble, but are all left in the cliff; the arches, the walls, and altar table too, and the roof, which appears as if it were

carved in dark wood, is nothing but the rock with the great mountain above it. And those angels, how lovely! eh, Annibale?"

Hannibal takes his pipe out of his mouth and nods.

"What are the angels?" I inquire.

"Oh! two angels with outspread wings above the altar where the Madonna is. She is sculptured in relief, but these stand up like statues, and they are so beautiful that it makes tears come in one's eyes to look at them."

This is the way the Italian peasantry, even in remote parts, appreciate art. From whence comes this love of the beautiful and of music in them, and this suavity of manner that makes the poorest peasant speak to his superiors with as much freedom and polish as a marquis, but without a thought of self-assertion? Compare it with the defiant boorishness of English labourers, and say how it is to be explained.

It must be, as I have before said, because the Italian is an older civilization, which has grown inrooted among the people, while the English is a new one, and as yet has not leavened all classes of society. Another reason may be the comparative freedom of the Italian *contadini*. They are not like the English, mere hirelings, at so much a day

under a master, but they work their *podere* themselves, sometimes under a resident landowner, sometimes alone; and instead of mere wages they take half the produce of the land. I suppose with this system, agriculture as a science is not brought to any high stage of perfection, but the self-respect and well-being of the working man is a great social good.

We are forgetting, however, the *festa* at the Eremita. There is also a *fiera* at the Borgo di Lucca, a little town near the shrine, which being held at the same time enables the mountaineers to combine devotion and business, by buying their *canapa*, a kind of hemp of which they weave their sheets and linen. The party brought back several great bales of this in the rough; and this morning two men are at work in the house of the Bettoni "carding" it.

All these primitive contrivances interest me much; I can imagine how the ancients lived in the times of Homer, when Andromache spun and Penelope wove.

These itinerant carders had two instruments which looked like large brushes with iron spikes instead of bristles. These were tied to a table with string, and they drew the rough hemp through and through them till it was in hanks

of fine shiny thread, ready for spinning. The peasants lay up these hanks in their houses ready to employ the housewives during the long winter evenings and snowy days, when Matilde says they all meet together in one house, "so that one fire warms us all, and nobody is lonely," and spin away for hours.

They are not idle even in the summer, as I can testify. The sheep girls spin as they lead their flocks; for like the shepherd of Scripture the flocks follow, but are not driven. The post girl spins as she comes to bring us our letters from Piteglio, carrying our correspondence in her upturned apron.

The women who go to fetch wood or herbage from the forests carry their *ceste*, or round baskets, be they full or empty, on their heads, and busily whirl their spindles as they walk.

That they make good use of their industry we see by the long strips of thick strong linen laid out on the grass to bleach in the sun, and by the bales of thick flannel or cloth which they send to the neighbouring town to dye. There are only one or two looms in the hamlet, and the housewives take turns at them to weave their linen. This week Beppina is weaving cloth to make garments for her brother to wear when he

goes to the Maremma for the winter, for the mountaineers do as their Umbrian forefathers did three thousand years ago: feed their flocks on the mountains in summer, and till the plains, when they are dry enough, in the winter. Next week Rosa, the dairywoman, has bespoken the loom to weave some sheets.

Such a primitive loom as it is! The men made it themselves, as they do most other domestic furniture. It is of great rough beams, with a treadle made of a board and moved with ropes; the "comb" through which the threads pass is of strips of cane fixed into a twine-bound frame. The shuttles are the size of a toy boat. And yet this rough machine makes splendidly strong fabrics that wear for years, and will bear mending to the last.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CHARCOAL BURNERS.

September 12.—One of the women having offered to guide us to the *carbonari* in the forest; we set off with the children to add to our useful information the knowledge of how *carbone*, or charcoal, is made.

Beppa, the peasant, trips along barefooted and erect with her basket on her head. Isa, the English child, follows vainly trying to emulate Beppa by carrying on her head a large bit of wood, which falls off every few minutes to the peril of her toes. Harry flies here and there in pursuit of every other flying creature he can see; while the mother strolls leisurely along, her sketch-book under her arm, her studio spread out wide before her, in the large-leaved graceful trees that make moving shadows all around; in the lichen-tinted rocks that start up here and there amidst the purple heath and green ferns; in the distant mountains that take varying shades and colours

in the changing light; and in the spreading forests that clothe the nearer hills. They are all of one kind of tree, and yet take a thousand different greens, browns, and blues, as the cloud shadows glide over them, or as the smoke-wreaths float above them from the charcoal burners' fires.

It is a long climb, and the mountain foot-path is stony. We pass several level spaces where the blackened ground tells that the *carbonari* have once used them. At length we are enveloped in a faint blue mist; in the midst of which is a large black mound, from whence the smoke issues curling from a thousand tiny holes in its sides. A boy is hewing wood close by, and he explains to us that this heap has been smouldering four days, and is nearly done. He says the wood is packed up underneath in a close pile, leaving only a little well in the centre. When it is piled it is covered with earth, and then with turf placed close over it. A lighted stick is then sent down from the top into the well, where small firewood has been placed; and when it is lighted the hole is closely covered up. In this way the whole pile smoulders for days, but never bursts into a flame.

"Suppose it *were* to catch fire?" asks Ida.

"Why, then, we should lose all our labour,

signorina, and have only ashes instead of *carbone*; and it *does* happen sometimes," says the boy, "all the worse for us."

"Do you stay here all night to watch it?"

"One of us has to get up and come all the way over here once every night, to see if it is all right, when the fires are first lit. Sometimes we sleep in one of the little forest huts."

Then he proposes that we should go a little higher up the forest to another place, where his father is at work building up the wood to make a third mound; another was burned and ready to be uncovered lower down. A short climb brings us to the father and another brother.

One always has an idea of charcoal-burners being very low in the scale of civilization; but in Italy even they have a share of polish. Our new friend looks up from his labour of setting logs on end, in even, close file, so as to form a circular heap, to say, "Good evening, signoria; are you come to pay me a visit?—welcome, but you will find my trade is a very material one (un mestiero materiale). There is not much poetry in the life of the *carbonaro*," and he laughs sarcastically at his own black face and garments.

We learn that he and his younger sons gain

their living by this trade, going from place to place, as the owners of the forests require them. The landowner has to cut the wood and bring it to the place; then the *carbonaro* builds his pyres and lights his fires, and has to deliver the charcoal packed in sacks, being paid half a franc for every donkey or mule load, which is two sacks. One mound yields about forty sacks, so they reckon on ten francs each burning.

By having three or four mounds in hand at a time,—building a second as soon as the first is lighted,—they might clear thirty francs in about nine or ten days; but then there are the risks of the piles catching fire instead of smouldering, or else being too much consumed.

"It is a poor living, and a very trying one, signora," concludes the man; "but *we* must live, and *you* must have your dinner cooked, and 'so the world goes' (cosi va il mondo)." Then brightening up he adds, "I have another son."

"Seven years older than me," puts in our first charcoal acquaintance.

"Gia!" continues the father; "he was wiser than I am, he left off being *carbonaro* and went to Mantua to be a clerk. He is with a lawyer, and sits in an office, wears clean linen, and lives the life of a gentleman."

The black-faced man is evidently proud of his clever son, and pleased with our praise of his own wisdom in having given him education.

"Yes," he says; "*sapere è potere* (knowledge is power)."

Then he leads us down the mountain to a third level, where a mound is ready to be uncovered, and mounting by a ladder on the top, he and the boys begin raking away the still smoking earth till they are lost in a cloud of dust.

"Is it hot up there?" inquires Harry.

"Altro!" says the man, and tells how he once let one foot slip through into the soft burning earth, and was lame for a month on account of it. The elder boy caps his father's account with a horrible story of a little boy who once fell into the deep hole in the centre, and got killed in a moment. Harry withdraws from the tempting ladder which he is ambitious to mount; and taking no more interest in the pursuit of such dangerous knowledge, he and his sisters retire to a safe distance, and spend the time till evening in making a garden,—their favourite play.

Harry, with his hoe—a manufacture of Pietro's which accompanies him everywhere—supplies the mould. Ida is landscape gardener, and lays out the ground in beds and walks. Isa is the florist,

who makes lawns of moss, flower beds with bits of heath and scabious, wild pinks and sweet-william, etc., stuck up in the ground. Then master Harry uses up his superfluous energy in fortifying (!) it with great pieces of stone and rock, which he can scarcely carry. All this is much more pleasant, they say, than that smoky charcoal!

Meanwhile the black-eyed Beppa, having filled her *cesta* with leafy ferns, to feed her sheep and cows, sets herself down, knitting in hand, to watch the children and talk with us.

"Ah, signora!" she exclaims, glancing at the clusters of spiked green chestnuts on the trees over head; "I wish you were going to stay till the chestnut harvest. That is the time to see the mountains—the woods are full of life and laughter, for we are all out, every one of us—men, women, and children. Ah, what merry days we have!"

"Do tell us about it," says Emily; and Beppa, nothing loth, begins to talk.

"Well, the harvest commences about the middle of October, and goes on all through November. The chestnuts lie thick on the ground, and we pick them up as fast as we can."

"What, shells and all?"

"Oh, no; the husks are open by that time, and

the nuts have fallen out; there are some, of course, not open, but those we crack on a stone,—there are plenty of rocks about here that make very good tables to break them upon." Then laughing she added, "I don't know but that we should be a little ashamed for you to see us in the old rags we wear at that time."

"Are old clothes necessary to a chestnut harvest?" we inquire much amused.

"Oh, yes; anything good would be sure to get spoiled, so we all save our very oldest petticoats and bodices to wear them out in October. The woods are damp and dirty; the thorns, briers, and branches tear one's skirts; and then every night when we go home, wet to the knees, we hang up our clothes all round the fire in the *seccatoio*, where the chestnuts are drying. Imagine how black and smoky they get by the end of a month of that treatment. Oh! we do look a crowd of wretched beings in rags and jags; but we don't mind that. We are all singing, laughing, and working together, so it is the best time of all the year. Then at night we sit spinning or resting round the fires in the drying rooms, and sing *stornelli* till bedtime. Every one is good-humoured at harvest time; and well they might be, for our winter's food falls at our feet without having either to dig or sow;

we only have to stoop and pick it up, like the Israelites did manna in the desert."

"How much do you gather in a day?" asks the mother.

"A good worker can pick up a sack or a sack and a half: we reckon that a family of six persons collects five sacks a-day, between good and bad harvesters."

"I wonder how every family can tell its own boundaries in these vast, trackless forests."

"Oh!" replies Beppa, "no fear of that; we have our own landmarks, and never intrude into other people's ground. This place where we are sitting is Pietro's holding; he bought it two years ago from a man of Piteglio. I and my brothers own a piece higher up, where that large pointed rock is. Then we have other bits about the forests, just as we have made money to buy from time to time. We think of exchanging a piece of our ground with Fiore Andrucci, for his adjoins our largest piece, and ours is more convenient for him."

"Do even the little girls work?"

"Yes; all who are old enough to walk, unless one is left to mind the babies at home. If we have not enough hands in the family, we hire a girl or a woman for the whole picking. She expects us to

give her food and a bed, or half a bed, and when the harvest is over a sack of chestnuts as her wages. Those who have large families and small holdings get a better supply by hiring out their daughters in this way."

"So there are 'superfluous women' in the Apennines, as well as in over-populated England," laughs the mother as she rises from her mossy seat to call the busy "landscape gardeners" home. They are very reluctant to leave their floral labours, but as the sun is low behind the rosy dome of the Pania, which we see under the leafy branches of the trees, it is time to turn our steps homeward.

On the way the children espy a distaff full of wool leaning against the trunk of a tree. Its owner is probably gone up the hill to pluck ferns and herbage for her sheep. Isa and Ida are struck with a bright idea: "What fun it would be to put some money amongst the wool on the distaff!"

The two little pairs of hands are soon busy. The joint-stock purse is drawn forth, council is held as to whether it shall be a *soldo* (halfpenny) or two *soldi* (penny). They decide on a halfpenny each, that both may have the pleasure of hiding it; and the generous fraud perpetrated, the two little conspirators walk, or rather dance on, hand in hand, wondering what the girl will say when the money

falls into her hands while spinning, guessing who the happy girl will be, opining that "she will say the fairies must have put it there," and regretting that they will not be near to see her surprise.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BEAR LEADER.

September 13.—A *fanfara* in the distance, a beating of drums and sounding of music! Is the world coming up to invade our mountain retreat?

We look from our windows. No advancing army is seen on the broad high road; yet the sound of drums approaches. It is already in the village street; the children rush to the courtyard gate. Strange forms are coming up the village street; everybody shouts; and we are also constrained to go and see what it is all about.

The mother half shrieks as she arrives at the gate, for there is her hopeful son Harry dancing round a huge brown bear, who is looking hungrily at the bread in the boy's hand; and there is a solemnly comic monkey perched on the hump of a camel's back. The villagers run to the piazza by twos and threes till the place is full.

Harry is mad with excitement, wants to ride

the camel, is barely restrained from pulling the bear's tail, and altogether keeps the mother in an agony. The independent baby loses her self-dependence, and flies to her nurse's arms, while the little girls take hands three in a row, and stand awestruck just within the gate.

It is a scene of the olden days,—the amusement of the men, the half-frightened look of the women as they hold their children tight by the hand, the very friendly look of the bear, and the extremely ferocious air of his human leader, are all like a quaint old picture-book. They ask for bread, and I don't know who is the most hungry—the bear, who growls because he only has half; the man, who takes half before giving any to the bear; or the monkey, who springs on the man's shoulder and snatches the last mouthful from his hand. The poor camel stands patiently, and would get nothing did not one of us take especial care to feed it.

The man shows off the bear's docility, which seems doubtful at times when the stick is freely used. He makes the camel kneel to be laden with the monkey; then gives a dissertation on the habits and peculiarities of the camel, to all of which Harry, with his hands in his knickerbocker pockets, responds with the insolence of extreme

youth, "I knew all that before; perhaps Jacopino did not, though, because he has not been to a kinder-garten." Jacopino is a tiny *contadino* of eight years old, who is Harry's devoted slave.

After a time the strange quartette—bear, camel, monkey, and man—departs, the drum sounding fainter and fainter in the distance, and we return to ordinary life again.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A VILLAGE TRAGEDY.

September 14.—The pretty Maria is drawing water from the Narcissus fountain just in front of the house which Luigi built, and while the copper vessel is being gradually filled, Luigi leans against the wall talking earnestly to her.

"To-morrow is the *festa* of the Holy Cross, Maria," he says; "will you and your mother come with me to see the *fiera* and fireworks at San Marcello?"

Maria blushes, looks confused, says, "Grazia, Luigi; ma (but)——"

LUIGI (suspiciously).—"But you do not care enough for me to go; is that it?"

MARIA.—"No, it's not that; but we have already promised to go with—with some one else."

LUIGI (flushing).—"I hope it is not with Carlino of Gavinana. I know he wanted you for *sposa*.

MARIA.—"And you know I refused him; you might be sure I should not go about to fairs with a man I had refused."

LUIGI (with a penetrating glance and face white with feeling).—"Then you are engaged to the one you mean to go with?"

Maria, in her confusion, plays with the stream of water from the fountain, and sends it in all



ETRUSCAN VASE.

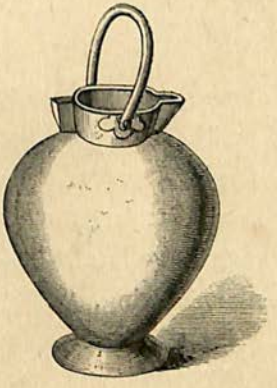
directions over the plump fingers, instead of into the vase.

LUIGI.—"Well, you do not answer me."

MARIA.—"I suppose I must marry some time; a girl cannot live always on her parents."

LUIGI.—"You might have waited for me; you know I love you better than any one else ever can."

MARIA (flushing in her turn).—"And what good will it do to wait for you? Your mother will not let you bring me home, and I am too proud to enter a family unwilling to receive me. My mother thinks it better for me to marry a man that has a house of his own, and no mother-in-law to put over my head."



MEZZINA OR WATER VASE, CARRIED BY TUSCAN PEASANTS, 1878.

LUIGI (deprecatingly interrogant).—"Then you are going to marry Angelo the widower?"

Maria nods.

LUIGI.—"Oh, Maria! a widower whom you only saw two months ago; and I have loved you, and no one else, for five years!"

MARIA (with spirit).—"If the widower has a

home to give me, and you have none; if he has no one but me to care for, and you have to obey your mother before you think of your wife; if with him I shall be honoured, and with you scorned,—have I not a right to marry him. A girl must think for her future life. He is a good *occasione*, and my father and mother both wish it." Then, tearfully, "I don't say I love him as well as I could you, who have been kind to me all my life."

Luigi has been during this speech leaning against the wall with his hands before his eyes, and the water ripples in streams over the edges of the too full *mezzina*; he now suddenly opens wide the palms of his two hands in that beseeching Italian attitude, exclaiming, "Why, oh why, did you tell me this? Why not let me be happy a little while longer?"

MARIA.—"Because I thought you would rather hear it from me than from any one else; and if you wish me well, do promise, dear good Luigi, promise me not to tell the neighbours; we want to keep it a secret."

LUIGI (a slight spark of malice in his stony eye).—"You are afraid of the music, are you?"*

The "music" spoken of by Luigi refers to an old cus-

Then softening, "No, Maria; I will not tell,—of course I can't help it if they see I am *appassionato*, for I shall have no heart for work for many a day. Oh! why have you done it?"

MARIA (taking her wet *mezzina* on her head, and gliding off erect).—"I am but obeying my mother in marrying another, as you have obeyed yours in not taking me for *sposa*."

Transfixed by this Parthian arrow, poor Luigi covers his face again and stands for some moments shaking with deep sobs; then with a rush he enters his house where the thoughts of Maria have grown into the very walls, and battles with his grief alone.

September 15.—No one saw him any more that night, and the next day he disappeared from the village before the *festa* goers were abroad. We suppose he spent the holiday in lonely fashion, nursing his sorrow on the hills, for the following

tom which is still practised in country regions. A great prejudice has always existed against second marriages, which they say trouble the soul of the defunct wife or husband; and when a widow or widower marries, the youths of the village serenade the *spose* for several nights with all the discordant noise-producers they can obtain, tongs, shovels, *mezzine*, fryingpans, whistles, etc., etc. In these districts it is called the *scampanata;* at Pesaro, *tucca*. (De Gubernatis, "Usi Nuziali," p. 243.)

morning saw him working stolidly as ever, his stiff features settled into a painful solemnity, which was the only sign of the passion within his heart.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE HAPPY SPOSO.

September 16.—Whilst our poor friend Luigi "goes heavily" in his trouble, his lucky brother Giulio walks radiant in his joy. His constancy is to be rewarded, Flaminia's father has given his consent, and the wedding will take place after the chestnut gathering. The "asking" has already been responded to. This "asking" is a curious mountain practice. De Gubernatis, in his "Usi Nuziali," p. 77, says the would-be bridegroom, or his nearest male relation, goes to the house of the wished-for bride, and knocking at the door says, "Io vengo a cercare una giovenca bianca e di una bellezza perfetta che voi possedete e che potrebbe fare la gloria del mio gregge e la consolazione de' miei vecchi anni." ("I come to seek a young damsel, fair and of a perfect beauty, whom you possess, and who might be the glory of my flock and the consolation of my old age.") The mother or father of the girl answers in language equally patriarchal,

and pretending to consent, brings out one by one the other women of the house, asking as each is presented, "Is this the one you desire?" The expectant denies each in turn, and after a longer pretended search the real bride is brought forth, but she must hang back and seem to be dragged with force. Then the bridegroom claps his hands, and to the usual question responds fervently, "è quanto io desidero." After that the betrothal is a recognized fact.

There is generally a private betrothal between the lovers besides, which consists frequently in what is called the *tocca mano* (touch of the hand). It is considered quite binding, as one or two *stornelli* show, where a lover prays his beloved one to *tocca-mi-la mano*, in sign of betrothal.

Beppa, who gives us much information, thus describes the mountain custom of making love. "When a young man who has never had any thought of marriage sees at last a certain maiden, he says within his own heart, 'That girl would suit me.' So he goes and speaks to her, saying, 'Good damsel, are you betrothed?' If the girl answers yes, he has to give up thinking about her; but if she blushes and says, 'Nobody has asked for me,' he demands, 'Will it please you to let me make love to you? and then, if we like each other, I will

ask you of your father.' (Che ti piacerebbe di far l'amore con me? e poi se ci piaciamo l'una all'altra vi domanderò per sposa.) So," adds Beppa, "he makes his court to her, and after a time asks, 'Well, do you like me well enough to marry me?' If she says 'Yes,' he 'asks' for her, and they begin to get the *corredo* ready."

"But supposing the father will not give his consent?" we suggest.

"Why, then," quoths Beppa, "either they must give each other up, or if they cannot live without each other, and if her father won't let her go out at the door, she jumps out of the window, and they go off without his consent. Parents don't often refuse without good reason, for they know it is either life or death to a girl."

The *corredo* is a great point in Italian weddings. It does not mean simply the bride's personal *trousseau*, but the house and bed linen which it is her part to provide. The bride has also to find the furniture of the nuptial chamber, while the *sposo* furnishes the rest of the house.

In some remote parts of Italy a great ceremony is made of the sending home the *corredo*. A procession of friends and neighbours is formed; each one carries either a box or basket, a chair, washstand, or a mirror, while the bed is placed ready

made on a large ox-cart, the oxen being decorated with flowers and ribbons.

Giulio's bride, being what is called rich in the mountains, is preparing a grand *corredo.*

Bales of homespun linen have been laid up in her mother's house, the fruits of many years of industry, and Flaminia will come provided not only with strong garments trimmed with the coarse thread lace which the nuns make in their convents, but with embroidered bed jackets, embroidered pillow covers, worked sheets, etc., for grand occasions, besides the unusual luxury of table cloths and *serviettes.*

We shall not be here at the wedding, but can imagine all that will take place. Giulio will go to Piteglio in the early morning with his friends and supporters; he will take his bride from her mother's arms, and, followed by a large party, will first have the priest's blessing and the sacred marriage in the church, then will come the legal ceremony at the *comunita;* after which follows a day of feasting.

The wedding banquet is as old as the Etruscans, and is always kept up amongst even the poorest of the peasants. They eat certain cakes, called *croquettes,* of which the bride must partake first, to bring her good luck. *Confetti* (comfits) are

handed round and eaten by all the guests. It is a great sign of prosperity if they are showered on the bride on her departure from the house of her parents. It is also thought a good sign for the bride's future happiness if a flask of wine be broken or if wine be spilt in any way at the wedding feast. But should the oil be spilled, woe to the *sposi*, they are sure to be unhappy! We may be sure Giulio's wedding will not be either on a Friday or Tuesday. An Italian proverb says,—

> " Ne Venerdi, ne Marte
> Non si sposa e non si parte."
>
> (You should not marry nor go on a journey either on Friday or Tuesday.)

The fact of Tuesday being dedicated to Mars, god of war, is very likely the origin of the superstition. After the feast will follow a grand singing of *stornelli* and *rispetti*, many of them original and composed for the occasion; and if a *poete* or *improvisatore* happen to be of the company, he will no doubt turn out yards of ready-made hexameters in praise of the *sposi*. Possibly a dance will follow, and then the *sposo* leads his wife to his paternal home, followed by all the friends with great hilarity. I do not know of any especial

customs prevalent here at this part of the ceremony, but De Gubernatis, in his "Usi Nuziali," tells us that in some parts of Italy the mother-in-law stands at the door, and when the bride arrives asks, "Is it war or peace between us?" If the daughter-in-law answers "peace," the elder woman kisses her and lets her pass. In some parts she has to step over a broom at the threshold, and if she stumbles it is considered as a sign of careless habits on her part. In others she is given a *mestola*, or wooden spoon, as an emblem of her future occupation to cook for her husband.

Italian wives do not seem to find the difficulty that English ones have in living peaceably with a mother-in-law. The patriarchal system which has come down from ancient times is so ingrained in their domestic life, that one sees two or three generations living in one house in perfect peace. Yet, as we see in poor Luigi's case, the parents even of grown-up sons have power to prevent them from bringing an unwelcome wife beneath the family roof.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MORTALITY OF CLOTHO.

September 24.—Poor old Clotho! no longer one of the immortal Fates, she has herself succumbed to the destiny of humanity. For the last month the white-haired old grandmother has been very infirm, scarcely able to walk about on her swollen feet; but she still sat spinning at the gate, or on the quaint little *loggia* of her son Pietro's house. For the last three days, however, she has been missed from her usual haunts. Calmly and peacefully she has taken to her bed, where she lies happy and smiling to the last. "I have no pain," she asserts, "but it rests my tired old feet to stay in bed."

Her son and his family take great care of her. "Send to tell my other children I am ill," she says. "Let me see who cares for me enough to come round me at the last." Letters are written or messages sent by the pretty granddaughters to married daughters and sons in neighbouring vil-

lages; but old Clotho grows daily weaker, and none of them fly to her side. They think, "What can we do? poor mother is old, she has all Pietro's family to take care of her, she wants for nothing; and there is so much to do in the fields now;" and so on and so on, till the grandmother is weary of waiting for her children who do not come. She nods her head, as one who is wise, and taking her bearded son by the hand says, "Ah, Pietro, I see you are the only one who stays by me till the end, and have always stood by me since your father died. You were the youngest; and when he died he parted his land and his savings among them all; but you, because you were little, got nothing. They all went away from me with their money, and some spent it well for themselves and some spent it ill, but none of them stayed with their old mother except you, and you shall not lose anything by it. Go and call Luigi, he writes like a lawyer, and I will make my will, as your father did, and you shall not be left out this time."

Luigi comes reluctantly to the house of his former love; he does not see her, however, for she has fled to a neighbour's house before he enters.

Then Clotho makes her will, saying, "Write down that I leave fifty francs of my earnings and savings to distribute among the friends who come

to my funeral, and a good fee out of it to the priest to say a mass for my soul; and then write that everything else I leave to Pietro; the others had their father's money and he had none; they left me alone, and he has always stayed by me. Jesu! let me die in peace."

After this she sleeps calmly, but revives on awaking, and it is not till two days later that one of the granddaughters hastens out to the road where Pietro is watching his pony feed, to call him. For once in his life he deserts his four-footed friend and hurries home, where his old mother is propped up in her bed drawing fluttering breaths. Her face brightens up as he approaches, and she passes away holding by the hand her youngest son, who had "stayed with her to the last."

This afternoon her *trasporto* (as they call the "carrying away") takes place. An unusual serious excitement pervades the village; every man, woman, and child is assembled on Pietro's *aja*, group after group arrives from Piteglio; Annina and her five brothers come from the Pieve. All the men who belong to the village "Società della Chiesa," wear their white linen garments with girdles. Every head is bare, and every right hand holds a torch or candle.

The bier is placed in the household kitchen, and the friends pass in, one by one, to take their last glance at the bright old face which will never smile again in this world. Its last look is a smile, which illumines her still features as she lies there clad from head to foot in her festal garments, the red handkerchief we had given her tied under her motionless chin.

Then the bier is closed and six white-robed men, taking it on their shoulders, move slowly off, while the procession forms behind them. It is a long procession of seventy couples; and before it starts each person has received a few *soldi* (halfpennies) from the grandmother's fifty francs. First the members of the family follow, with their torches and sad faces; next the white ephods, two and two, all ready to change places when the bearers are tired; then come the women and children in pairs, each with a glimmering light in her hand. The long line takes a slow, serpentine course across the reaped cornfields to the old church of the Pieve. Here they halt and change bearers, then wind their way down the zigzag mule road to the black cross in the valley. At the foot of the cross they rest and change again, then pass over Harry's bridge and up beneath the trees to Piteglio. The church bells are filling the valley with their tolling

notes; the priest, the *frate* and their acolytes, all in white, await the dead at the entrance to the village, and lead the procession up the tortuous little streets to the church. Here the bier is placed in the centre of the nave, with tall candles all around it. The priest sprinkles both bier and mourners with holy water, then the whole multitude fall on their knees whilst he prays for the soul of the departed, after which the congregation disperses. The absolute interment is an entirely private affair, mostly accomplished by the sextons at night. The duty of friends to the dead seems to consist in giving due honour to the *trasporto* and in placing her in the priest's custody after sharing his prayers.

Poor, bright old Clotho! The very sight of a distaff of white wool will be pathetic henceforth for her sake!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FAREWELLS.

September 29.—The last day among the chestnuts has dawned! Our many trunks and hampers are packed and already despatched, for the amiable pony with such a load behind him will assuredly assume his slowest pace to take them to Pistoja.

Sad faces meet us at every point, the shadow of departure is on us all. The village children—Assuntina, the two Isolinas, and fair little Celestina—hover about the lawn, sending in periodical farewell bouquets to the ladies. Aunt Louisa and the artistic friend have their toilet tables encumbered with curious little nosegays of dandelions, colchicum, and daisies. Pietro appears with five huge red apples in his hand, one to refresh each child on the morrow by the way.

The children make a pilgrimage to their favourite play-place, a turn in the road some half-mile away, where five chestnut trees sprung from a

single root. These trees are known in the family as "the five sisters," each one has its name and its juvenile mother or appropriator. To day the trees have to be embraced and kissed; and Ida and Isa, having made wreaths of large chestnut leaves, the five trees are solemnly garlanded, and very impressive farewells taken. Every hollow tree which has in their frequent walks done duty as a house is bid "addio" to, as the children return up the broad road homewards.

We gather all the purple heath and green ferns we can as we follow our juniors, and the fancy takes us to make wreaths too; having made them we must dispose of them, so we place them on the two wayside crosses where the grandmother rested on her last journey. And thus, tired of a long, long, last day in a dismantled house, we welcome the night, even though to-morrow at dawn we descend to the lower world again. The hot, busy, dusty, material world!

Our summer pastoral is ended!

FINIS.


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